Clinton or Greenspan: Whose Boom Is It?

The Washington Monthly

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Letters

No Pinocchio?

There has actually been more exaggeration about Gore and *Love Story* than Robert Parry's article states. At one point in his piece, Parry refers to "Gore's expressed belief that he and his wife Tipper had served as models for the lead characters" of the book/movie. But did Gore ever express such a belief? Not according to the actual reporting on this ridiculous incident.

In the December 14, 1997 *New York Times*, Melinda Henneberger wrote a lengthy article detailing the facts of this silly story. Henneberger interviewed Karen Tumulty and Richard Berke, the only journalists present when Gore discussed *Love Story*. The two reporters agreed: Gore only said that he had seen a newspaper story quoting Erich Segal on the subject. Henneberger quoted Tumulty: "He said all I know is that's what [Segal] told reporters in Tennessee." Everyone agrees that there was such a story, in the *Nashville Tennessean*. Segal told Henneberger that the *Tennessean* reporter, playing the "local hero angle" had (here we go again) "exaggerated" what Segal told him. Segal had told the reporter that Gore was a model for the Ryan O'Neal part. The reporter expanded what Segal said, mentioning Tipper as well.

Gore said he saw a newspaper story. Everyone agrees that there was such a story. The person "exaggerating" the facts was a journalist. But on the basis of this ridiculous story, Gore has been branded a liar for years. Welcome to our relentlessly negative and reliably mindless press era.

BOB SOMERBY
Baltimore, Md.

Fire With Fire

I was sorry that Robert Parry did not attempt to contact me before he faulted my reporting in his story about Al Gore's exaggerations. If he had, I would have told him this: Al Gore and his campaign have never disputed that he took credit for finding Love Canal. Yes, I misquoted a word in the latter part of his comment, and I regret that. But there is no question about Mr. Gore's overall meaning. The operative quote—"I found a little place in upstate New York called Love Canal"—is not in doubt. In fact, Mr. Gore called *The Associated Press* in Buffalo the next day and apologized to the people of Love Canal for taking credit. Mr. Parry is correct that this story has been "amplified endlessly by the rest of the news media." Unfortunately, *The Washington Monthly* has contributed to that echo chamber without checking the facts.

KATHARINE Q. SEELYE
Washington, D.C.

The Truth About Gore

Robert Parry in "He's No Pinocchio" constructed some very flimsy strawmen. These, I believe, are of more substance:

During his eight years in the House Al Gore had an 84 percent pro-life voting record. He now claims that he has always been pro-choice. I applaud his present position but deplore his lack of honesty about it. In Congress he quite naturally supported the tobacco interests—they were his constituents—but he now claims that he was always opposed to the production and use of tobacco products. (It has been reported that at one time the Gore family were growers of tobacco.)

In 1992, referring to George Bush's grant of a waiver giving the Chinese access to satellite technology, Gore said "President Bush is an incurable patsy for those dictators he sets out to coddle." He later supported the sale of even more technology to the Chinese which required the reversal of an order issued by the Secretary of State prohibiting such sales. Obviously Gore changed his mind, and perhaps it was the right thing to do, but he was not willing to stand up and say so. He seems unwilling to show us his real self, afraid perhaps that we will not like what we see.

Gore and Clinton were very critical of Bush for granting Most Favored Nation status to China. When in office, Clinton, with Gore's support, did exactly that with most unfortunate timing—as they did it around the time the Chinese were making contributions to the DNC. It may have been coincidence but it sure looked bad and once again there was no admission of a change in position.

After almost eight years of this sort of duplicity we should be forgiven for hoping for a little more honesty. It just takes courage, that's all.

HENRY CLIFFORD
Wainscott, N.Y.

War on Fries

You report, "Over 50,000 people suffer drug-related deaths in the United States each year and Gen. McCaffrey continually emphasizes studies that show that illegal drug use annually costs this country $110 billion."

The obesity that results from "food abuse" causes over a quarter-million deaths per year in the U.S., according to the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*, Vol. 282, 1999). And the *Reuters* news service reports (September 16, 1999): "Obesity costs the United States $238 billion a year in expenses from its associated diseases such as diabetes, stroke and heart disease, [and this does not] include the costs of treating obesity itself, which affects more than 22 percent of Americans."

Why are we wasting our time and money with drug prohibition? Junk-food prohibition would obviously save far more lives and money.

PETER WEBSTER
REVIEW EDITOR, INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF DRUG POLICY
Quartier Les Vignes
Auvare, France

Giving W. More Than His Due

In one April segment [of Tilting at Windmills], Mr. Peters touts George W. Bush's educational accountability statements without looking at what Bush has and has not done. The accountability portion of Texas' public education system (the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test) was started under Gov. Ann Richards. Educational bills that have improved public education while Bush has been governor are bills sponsored and passed by Democrats in the Texas Legislature.

If Mr. Peters and *The Washington*

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Monthly will look at Bush's actual record and what he takes credit for but did not support, you will find the real story. In addition to education, Bush is now taking credit for Texas' CHIPs and HMO Patients' Bill of Rights, bills he vetoed the first time they passed the Legislature. CHIPS became law without Bush's signature; he signed the Patients' Bill of Rights because another veto would have been overridden.

CORINNE SABO
San Antonio, Texas

Not Really A Revolution

Andrew Cockburn ("The New Iran," April 2000) claims that the new regime in Iran represents the culmination of a social revolution freeing the people of Iran from the dictatorial regime of the Shah. With praise even for Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, despite the obvious connection of this cleric to the seizure of American citizens both in Iran and Lebanon, Mr. Cockburn conveniently overlooks the gross repression of any perceived deviation from the interpretation of the teachings of the Koran by a succession of Ayatollahs.

Certainly the involvement of Iran in the terrorist bombing of Pan Am 103, the murder of Alisa Flatow in Israel, the terrorist attacks by the Hezbollah on Israel, and the projected trial of thirteen innocent Jews in Iran have shown that "social justice and reform" are illusory and contrary to the conventional definition of these terms. Iran remains a nation sponsoring international terrorism, bitterly antagonistic to the U.S. and dedicated to the destruction of the State of Israel.

NELSON MARANS
Silver Spring, Md.

More To The Story

An addendum to Nicholas Thompson's cogent assessment of Clinton's Colombia policy ("Overdose," April 2000): United Technologies is not the only U.S. industry to heavily benefit from this military-aid package. Throughout the House debate, Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum—an oil company with Colombian operations that have spanned nearly the entire duration of the civil war—ferried through Congress its message that Plan Colombia's success rests in that country's ability to revive the economy, with "oil development [as] the foundation of this recovery." In his February 15 testimony before a House subcommittee hearing on Colombia, Oxy VP Lawrence Meriage implored Congress to increase counter-narcotics operations to northern regions to "help augment security" for Oxy's oil installations there. Last September, Sen. Paul Coverdell and Sen. Mike DeWine presented a bill similarly urging Colombia to undertake measures "intended to open its economy fully to foreign investment and commerce, particularly in the petroleum industry, as a path toward economic recovery and self-sufficiency."

But protecting oil as a key revenue has not come without severe social and environmental cost to Colombians, as the U'wa indigenous community's nine year struggle with Occidental demonstrates. Last month, in fact, a Colombian court suspended Oxy's oil project on U'wa land, citing the project's potential to violate that community's fundamental rights, including their right to life.

How bad is the situation? Since only January, the escalation of military presence around Oxy's oil project on U'wa land has led to human rights violations committed by police and army forces including forced evictions, arbitrary detentions, unlawful seizure of property, and blockage of food and medicine. Meanwhile, left-wing guerrillas continue to bomb neighboring oil facilities, acts which threaten civilian safety and surrounding wetlands. It was also near this native land coveted by Occidental that FARC guerrillas kidnapped and brutally assassinated three U.S. human-rights advocates during their visit to the U'wa community last spring.

In his swan song for increased military protection, Mr. Meriage testified before Congress that such guerrillas also extort a "war tax" from Oxy contractors and "protection money" from Oxy's local workers. It raises a host of questions regarding Colombia's development debate that a U.S. corporation openly admits paying the very extralegal armed forces the U.S. military aid purportedly aims to counter.

ABBY REYES
U'WA DEFENSE PROJECT
Santa Cruz, Calif.

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Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

The Beresford's Backyard • Mandy Does It Right • Cracking the Cynic's Code
Switching in South Carolina • The Cruelty of Markets • Eyes on the Prizes

WHY DO THE RICH WANT TO GET richer? A new television commercial for the Scudder Fund explains a reason. It asks: "What if your son gets into Harvard? What if your mother has to go into a nursing home? What if they both happen at the same time?" This kind of fretting can go on and on—what about the grandchildren? How much money will they need? What will Harvard cost then? So the million or so that you had always thought would be all you could need gradually turns into 10 million, then 20, then 100 as your imagination goes into overdrive with new visions of enormous drain on the family purse.

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IF, AS TOM BROKAW SAYS, THE World War II generation is the greatest generation, what's the worst? That's easy, writes Paul Begala in the April *Esquire*, it's the Baby Boomers. Selfishness, he says, is their primary characteristic. An example is supplied by a recent article in *The New York Times* describing the Nimby—"not in my backyard"—battles being waged by today's comfort class. It used to be that these fights were about garbage dumps and hazardous waste sites, writes the article's author David M. Herszenhorn; today they are about things every community needs—ball fields, libraries, school buildings, churches, and housing for their elderly—just as long as they are not too near the houses of the affluent. Residents of The Beresford, a celebrity-infested apartment house on Central Park West, fought the construction of the nearby American Museum of Natural History's new planetarium. Now they're protesting a proposed monument to Alfred B. Nobel. They say the people who might come to see the monument would crowd the sidewalk. Wealth breeds a sense of entitlement explains Rosalyn Baxandall, a professor of American studies. "People of a certain class think they have these rights and that they have earned them"—and that no one else should have them.

One of the less attractive traits of the market economy is the way it takes advantage of the innocent.

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"REPORT CLEARS First Lady and Others in FBI Files Case" read the headline in *The Washington Post* over the story that Robert Ray, who succeeded Ken Starr as independent counsel, had found "no 'substantial or credible' evidence that Hillary Rodham Clinton or any other senior White House officials sought confidential files of Bush and Reagan political appointees." In other words, the Filegate scandal was a phony. The *Post* put this story on page four. You have to wonder how many stories it had run on page one that strongly implied that Filegate was a major scandal.

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ONE OF THE LESS ATTRACTIVE traits of the market economy is the way it takes advantage of the innocent. A cruel manifestation of this characteristic was the practice of charging blacks more than whites for life insurance. When James D. Crane joined The Independent Life & Accident Insurance Co., his boss handed him two premium books: "You write the white people out of this and the niggers out of this." The premiums in the second book were about 25 percent higher.

Under pressure from the civil rights movement, insurers stopped this practice in the mid-'60s. That is they stopped it for new insureds. But not for those who were already insured, reveals *The Wall Street Journal*'s Scot J. Paltrow. Some of the companies continue to charge them the old rate. What's saddest about all this is that most of this overcharging is for what is called burial insurance. Even the poorest elderly blacks try to keep up their payments on this insurance in order to spare their families the cost of a funeral.

I'm usually in the cynics' camp when it comes to class action suits. I suspect that most of them are brought to enrich the lawyers involved. But some are laudable. And that would certainly be the case if a suit is brought on behalf of all the blacks who have been cheated since the rates were supposed to have been reduced in the '60s. The very possibility must make the insurance companies tremble. And if most of the damages went to the black victims, with the lawyers accepting only modest fees, it could be lovely.

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JUDICIAL WATCH, A RIGHT-WING group that has been hounding the Clintons, recently took advantage of the failure of the news about Hillary's innocence to overtake all

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the stories implying guilt. After the *Post* story was published, one of our readers received a mailing from Judicial Watch soliciting contributions to fund a class action suit against the Clinton White House in which Judicial Watch chairman Larry Klayman proclaims "I believe major criminal convictions will flow from this trial." Would Klayman be able to raise one dollar for this campaign if the letter recipients understood that Ken Starr's successor had cleared Hillary Clinton of the Filegate charges?

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MY OLD FRIEND MICKEY KAUS OF *Kausfiles.com* has challenged me as a former Peace Corps official to defend Al Gore's use of the term "volunteer" to describe his sister Nancy's service at the Peace Corps. I can't defend it. The term volunteer in the Peace Corps refers only to those who volunteer to serve overseas for two years at low pay. Nancy was a mid-level bureaucrat in the Washington office who was paid a respectable government salary. So Al Gore shouldn't say she was a volunteer. But I can understand why he wants to brag about her. She was a good and kind person who cared about the Peace Corps. She was my friend. I miss her.

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I WAS A FAN OF JOE KLEIN'S *Primary Colors*, so it will come as no surprise that I like his new book about a senatorial political campaign. It's called *The Running Mate*. I agree with the columnist Matthew Miller who says "Klein's novel joins the *NBC* series 'The West Wing' as a lonely outpost of empathy in a culture dripping with cynicism." Miller quotes former White House spokesman Michael McCurry as saying "there's an unwritten code among political reporters that if you write anything that is even semi-flattering or ... empathetic that you're not living up to the true calling of the journalist." Do you recall Richard Ben Cramer's *What It Takes*? It was the last empathetic account of political campaigns I can remember. And it was written eight years ago!

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ONE OF *THE WASHINGTON Monthly*'s least successful crusades has been to get better reporting about government agencies— about whether what they're doing is needed, whether they're performing their mission well or poorly, and how they can be improved. An example of the kind of reporting we want is Steve Pomper's article on the FDA last month. But outside our pages, there's not a lot to talk about. *The Washington Monthly* and a handful of other publications are the only ones that make a substantial effort to do this kind of story. I've become so worried about the problem that I've established a foundation called Understanding Government to try to encourage more of this kind of reporting.

But there are a few rays of hope. In the latest round of Pulitzer Prizes, two went to reporting about the performance of government agencies. One went to Katherine Boo for a report on how the District of Columbia agencies mishandled the mentally retarded in their care. Another one went to Tom Ricks, now of *The Washington Post*, for stories on the problems of the Pentagon written by him and his former colleagues at *The Wall Street Journal*. Jason DeParle of *The New York Times* won a Polk award for his reporting on how state and local government agencies are handling welfare reform. Journalists tend to notice the kind of articles that win prizes and often try to emulate them. Let's hope that's the case with these awards. And that the emulators take careful note of how the pieces were reported—by going to the action points where policy becomes reality: with Boo the homes where the retarded were ignored or mistreated, with Ricks the troops in the field, with DeParle the welfare offices and the homes and worksites of the welfare recipients. Look at what's going right or wrong at the action points and then track the causes back through the bureaucracy and the legislation. That's the magic secret.

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FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE dysfunctionality of the D.C. government described by Boo comes in another *Post* article headed "Brianna Report Cites Chaos in 7 D.C. Agencies." Even top administrators who are supposed to clean things up become part of the problem. It develops that all those utility cuts in the street that have been disrupting District traffic for months can be traced to the man who is supposed to be saving us, Mayor Tony Williams. It was he who, while serving as the District's chief financial officer, "repeatedly stalled," in the words of the *Post*'s Carol D. Leonnig, efforts to get the utilities to pay for those cuts. And consider Vivianne Hardy Townes who was hired to be an advocate for the city's mentally ill and disabled. According to an audit, again reported by the tireless Leonnig, she misspent $725,000, including $54,000 in charge slips that "tell a tale of shopping, meals, and vacations for herself and her husband: a tour of Africa, shoes from Saks, dresses from Nieman Marcus, dinners at Houlihan's and Lauriol Plaza."

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IN APRIL, TWO REPUBLICAN legislators in South Carolina switched to the Democratic Party. This reverses a 30-year trend in the South during which Democrats have become Republicans. Do the two South Carolinians signify that the tide has turned? They may. The reason is that Republican religious conservatives are leaving no room for moderates. "They just seem to have lost touch with people on important things like education," Margaret Gamble, one of the switchers, explained to David Firestone of *The New York Times*. She gave as an example a "First Steps" preschool program that she said Republicans blocked because they believed mothers should be taking care of preschoolers.

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MANDY GRUNWALD IS DOING IT right. I refer to the flat rate she is charging Hillary Clinton for her services as a campaign consultant. As you may recall from last month's "Tilting," I am not an admirer of the customary practice by which consultants are paid commission. This gives them an almost irresistible motive to incur the maximum campaign expense so that they will be paid the maximum fee. It is thus a significant factor in the escalating cost of political campaigns. Which means that politicians have to raise more money—and that means they have to be even nicer to the people who have money.

They were never inaccurate—but they were used.

This point is finally getting the attention it deserves. Just a few days after the Tilting item appeared, *The Washington Post* published a series of articles highlighting the dangers the commissions represent.

I was disappointed to see that *Slate*'s Jodi Kantor made fun of the *Post* for suggesting that money matters too much to the political consultants. "But hey, those are the goals that motivate every industry," writes Kantor. I have known consultants for whom the primary goal is getting good candidates elected. Sure they want to make a decent living but their driving passion is not money. I just wish there were more of them, which is what Jodi Kantor should be encouraging instead of cynically dismissing the possibility of idealism.

The Post series is laudable for another reason. It reveals the stake television stations have in excessive campaign expenditures. Every dollar that is spent buying the time for political commercials is money in the bank for them. The reason I praise the *Post*'s Dan Morgan for having the courage to be tough about this problem is that it is one most newspaper owners don't want to face. They own television stations that profit from campaign spending, so they have little passion for any campaign reform that will reduce spending on these commercials. Consider the stations in just one city—Las Vegas, Nevada. In 1998 they earned $16.5 million from political ads.

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SPEAKING OF CYNICISM, IT IS spreading everywhere. Consider "Reporting Point," a news-letter put out by the Southwest Pilot's Association, which explains why the Association has funded the SWAPA Political Action Committee. "To some the idea of 'buying' influence sounds distasteful. But in Washington, this is the way the game is played." The sad fact is that the pilot's cynicism is realistic.

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I OWE SUSAN SCHMIDT AND Peter Baker a partial apology. In our March issue I said "read pages 284-85 of [Jeffrey Toobin's *A Vast Conspiracy*] for a devastating demonstration of the high percentage of falsehood and misleading innuendo in a February 5, 1998 story by Susan Schmidt and Peter Baker in *The Washington Post*." The words "devastating," "high," and "falsehood" were ill-chosen. Their story was totally defensible as accurate reporting.

Toobin's book, on which I relied, was wrong in stating that there was no internal inconsistency or evidence of Clinton's culpability in Lewinsky's late January proffer of testimony. He was also wrong to state that Lewinsky had not asked Linda Tripp to lie.

On the other hand, two other points Toobin made were right and demonstrate the overall point he and I were trying to make: That the *Post* and much of the rest of the media became tools of the independent prosecutor by often implying that he had more than he did—thus enabling Starr's office to bluff witnesses into saying what it wanted them to say before the immunity train left the station.

In their story, Schmidt and Baker offer this juicy tidbit: "Starr's office questioned a Justice Department lawyer who told a colleague he was aware of an agent who reportedly has said he guarded the door at the White House movie theater last summer while Clinton was inside with a young woman." Let's get this straight: A lawyer had told a colleague that he was "aware" of what an agent had "reportedly" seen. This was, I'm sure, true reporting of what Starr's office said, but it left the reader with what turned out to be an erroneous impression that Starr's office had another bombshell to toss at the President. And if the reader was in any doubt, Schmidt and Baker added: "Starr's decision to reject the proffer may reflect confidence in the rest of the case he is building."

Of course, it developed that Starr not only didn't have the agent but he didn't have a case. The train wasn't going to leave the station without Lewinsky's testimony which, by late summer, he made a deal to accept pretty much as originally proffered.

Schmidt and Baker aren't bad reporters. They were never inaccurate. But they were used.

That being said, I was still wrong to use those ill-chosen words and for them I offer Baker and Schmidt my heart-felt apologies.

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IN RESPONSE TO A RECENT SERIES of articles on the Corps of Engineers by *The Washington Post*'s Michael Grunwald, Army Secretary Louis Caldera proposed management reforms that would bring the Corps back under control of the civilian leadership of the Pentagon. Three senators immediately objected. And they weren't just any old senators—they were Appropriations Chairman Ted Stevens, Armed Ser-

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vices Chairman John Warner, and Public Works Chairman Robert Smith. Because the Corps has been run by the Iron Triangle of its own bureaucrats, the lobbies, and the Congress, it has been an indispensable source of premium pork. That's what the three senators really meant when they said the reforms "threaten the interests of Congress." If the secretary of defense actually tried to run the Corps he might derail the pet projects of the Congressmen.

The generals who run the Corps know that Congress is the source of their appropriations. The lobbyists are all for the present arrangement because it means more projects for their clients to profit from. And most of the press and public ignore the problem because they don't realize the importance of having a civilian secretary of defense appointed by an elected president in charge. But that's the way it's supposed to be under our Constitution. The Congress should legislate, the courts should adjudicate, and the president should run the executive branch.

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RECENTLY *THE WASHINGTON Post* ran a story reporting that the federal income tax burden "has shrunk to the lowest level in the last four decades." The 50 percent of the population that earns under $30,000 a year pays only two percent of all income taxes. All good news but J.D. Foster of the Tax Foundation points out, "It's like doing a story on the price of bread going down but ignoring that the prices of milk, eggs, butter, and other groceries have gone up." In other words, there are lots of other federal, state, and local taxes that people pay in addition to the federal income tax. For lower and middle income taxpayers the most burdensome of these is the social security tax. "The amount paid in payroll taxes," reports the Joint Economic Committee of Congress, "exceeds the amount paid in income taxes for 74 percent of the population."

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PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTEES ARE having to wait too long to be confirmed. The confirmation process not only takes too much time but it has turned into an ordeal for the appointee. He must fill out different forms for each senate committee that considers the nomination—and I've heard of appointees who had to deal with three separate committees. He also has to fill out long forms for the White House and the FBI. Then he waits and waits and waits. More than half of the appointees confirmed between 1984 and 1999 waited five months for the Senate's blessing, according to a recent report funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. By contrast, just one-sixth of the appointees confirmed between 1964 and 1984 waited that long.

The major reason is that senators, who used to let the president choose cabinet and sub-cabinet members who shared his views, now will drag their feet or even vote no when confronted with an appointee whose views they don't like. This deprives the people of the government they have chosen in a presidential election. It may be at least partially defensible in the case of Supreme Court justices, and other officials like the FBI director and the heads of the Federal Reserve and the General Accounting Office, whose appointments are for longer than the president's elected term. But it violates the separation of powers, not to mention the will of the people, in all those cases where the appointee serves at the will of the elected president.

One way senators express their displeasure with an appointee is by putting a "hold" on his nomination, which means the appointee cannot be considered without the senator's consent which is sometimes withheld permanently. It used to be that holds were merely a courtesy granted by the majority leader that made sure a senator with a doubt about a bill or an appointee would have a chance to explore his concerns before a vote was taken. It was not intended to serve as a device by which one member could veto a nominee. But that is what it has become.

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EXHAUSTED TRUCK DRIVERS cause accidents in which almost 800 people die annually, according to estimates by the Department of Transportation. Drivers now are permitted to drive 10 hours in a row, and after getting eight hours off for sleep are permitted to drive for 10 more. Since common sense suggests that those eight hours aren't all used for sleep, the possibility of fatigue seems very high. So the DOT has proposed that drivers get 12 hours off each day. In an attempt to sweeten the pie for the trucking industry, the DOT is agreeing to let the drivers drive the other 12 hours in a row so long as they don't drive more than 60 hours a week. This seems the most modest of reforms—whatever happened to the eight-hour day and the 40-hour week?—yet the trucking industry is indignant. "The DOT's proposal would force today's sophisticated e-commerce, point-and-click, just-in-time delivery back to old economy inefficiency," says Walter B. McCormick, Jr., the president of the American Trucking Association. He doesn't mention the lives it would save.

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HERE'S SOME GOOD NEWS. "The ranks of teachers are swelling with former pilots, lobbyists, and lawyers" reports Mary Lord of *U.S. News and World Report*. I don't know about the pilots but it's great to see those lobbyists and lawyers find a more decent line of work. More than half of the students admitted to graduate teacher training programs are career-switchers. Most of them, says Libby Hall, the director of one of the graduate teaching programs, "are drawn by the chance to do meaningful work; they want to do something that really makes a difference."

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ISO VP ASAP

IT'S HARD TO FIND the right running mate. And it's especially hard for a Democrat right now: George W. Bush has a Palm Pilot filled with intriguing candidates—from Colin Powell to congressional standouts like Chuck Hagel and big state governors like Tom Ridge. By contrast, the Democrats' little black book looks awfully thin. Some of the party's brightest stars were killed off in the purge of '94. And Gore's political papa, Bill Clinton, is such a scene stealer that the next generation has hardly had a chance to get noticed.

We'd like to see Al Gore happily married, so enough already with the excuses: Al can't run unless he makes a match and, despite all the handwringing, we can think of a number of very attractive possibilities. To help him get excited about popping the question, we asked a few friends of the *Monthly* to describe some of the most promising possibilities who are just a bit off the beaten track. We like them all—and, most important, we think that any one of them could make Al a very happy man.

Gore & Miller 2000

By James Carville and Paul Begala

ZELL MILLER

By choosing former Georgia governor Zell Miller as his running mate, Al Gore could add intellectual brainpower, rhetorical firepower, and lots of plain old populist piss-and-vinegar to this staid election.

Miller is widely and rightly acclaimed as the best governor in Georgia history. He created the HOPE scholarship—dedicating the proceeds from the Georgia lottery to college scholarships. Rather than a something-for-nothing giveaway, Miller insisted only students with a B average could get the college aid. That single accomplishment has transformed his state.

Ninety-seven percent of incoming freshmen at the University of Georgia and Georgia Tech are HOPE scholars, and the promise of a free education has kept the best and the brightest from fleeing to the Ivy League. Minority enrollment jumped from 18 percent of the total student population to 21 percent. And across the state, educators are reporting that parents are more engaged than ever in their children's education, because Junior's B average means they save thousands of dollars in college costs.

And for students who cannot keep a B average or decide not to go to college, HOPE will pay for community college or technical school. The goal is to assure every young person a shot at the American Dream.

But HOPE is only the beginning. As Governor, Miller championed a tough on crime "Two Strikes and You're Out" law to lock up repeat violent felons. He reformed welfare and made Georgia one of the top two in state-funded research and development.

Miller's substantive record of accomplishment as governor would stand in stark contrast to the Pablum record of Gov. George W. Bush. Other than laughing about executing women and giving sanctimonious sermons, Bush has spent his time as governor raising money and running for president. Like Bush, Miller is a rabid baseball fan. But while Bush has been the Mario Mendoza of governors, Miller has been the Hank Aaron.

Lest you think this New Democrat is nothing more than an old Republican, you should know that Zell Miller devoted a year of his governorship to the battle to remove the racist symbol of segregation from the Georgia state flag. His courage nearly cost him reelection. But the former history teacher knew full well what Faulkner said of his beloved South: There the past is not dead; it's not even past.

Here again, the contrast would be terrific. Juxtapose the footage of Bush sucking up to the racists in South Carolina, bowing and scraping at Bob Jones University, with images of Miller standing strong against the bigots.

Miller would bring to the ticket a compelling personal story. In an election in which the final four candidates were the sons of a bank president, an admiral,

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a senator, and a president, Zell Miller was the son of a teacher—a teacher who died when Miller was just two weeks old. Raised by his mother in Appalachia, in a rock house she built herself, Miller found his focus in the United States Marine Corps, and his unabashed patriotism, combined with his down-home populism, makes him an American classic.

Zell Miller is also a world-class campaigner and orator. His keynote address to the 1992 Democratic convention ranks with Barbara Jordan's and Mario Cuomo's as one of the finest examples of powerful rhetoric and partisan passion.

At a time when politics seems moribund, Zell would bring energy. When people are looking for heroes, Zell's the real thing. And when Democrats need someone who's not afraid to open up a can of whup-ass on the radical right, they need look no further than Zell Miller.

JAMES CARVILLE, *a pamphleteer and a provocateur, and* PAUL BEGALA, *a professor at Georgetown and a pundit, were previously political consultants for Bill Clinton and Zell Miller.*

Gore 2000 & Whitman

CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN

Talk about implausible. My fellow TV blowhards look at me with pity when I suggest that New Jersey Governor Christine Whitman would be the best candidate. And they're right that there's almost zero chance Gore would ask her; it would piss off the Democrats too much.

But if he really wants to win, he should choose her. The country is moving into a post-partisan period, even if the politicians aren't. In one swoop, picking Whitman would make Gore much more appealing to independents (he trails Bush among them) and make sure that the gender gap stayed open. Whitman on the Democratic ticket would be a loud message to the voters that the Republican Party is irredeemably right-wing and hopeless on a woman's right to choose. In New Jersey, she has governed six years essentially as a New Democrat, closer ideologically to Gore than to Bush.

Whitman is unacceptable on the GOP ticket because she supports so-called partial birth abortion—a total deal-breaker for Bush because it would cause a walkout at the convention. She might turn Gore down—she has already endorsed Bush—but having decided she's not running for Senate, what else is she going to do with her life? The argument that she has no future in Republican politics if she did this makes no sense, because she has no future in that party anyway. When it comes down to it, few politicians refuse the chance when asked. Come on, Al. Be really bold.

JONATHAN ALTER, *a columnist at* Newsweek, *is a contributing editor of* The Washington Monthly.

Gore 2000 & Norquist

JOHN NORQUIST

Political devolution has brought stardom to many Republicans at the state and local level. Regional officials with national marquee value include Rudy Giuliani, Stephen Goldsmith, Tommy Thompson, and the Brothers Bush. But what many people don't know is that John Norquist, the Democratic Mayor of Milwaukee, has a record that beats all of these guys. Recently elected to his fourth term, Norquist is in the top tier of a class of New Democrats who got a big political boost when Clinton was elected in 1992. That year, Clinton chose a running mate who would reinforce his own image: smart, wonky, moderate. Gore should follow the same strategy and put John Norquist on the ticket.

Norquist is most admired for his successes in educational reform. Milwaukee became a prime testing ground for school choice when Norquist pushed through a plan that permits public funds to pay for private and religious schools. There's already evidence that the plan is working. Since the reforms, Milwaukee kids are doing better on standardized tests—with minority groups showing particular improvement. And while reform

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remains a contentious issue, Norquist continues to rack up impressive victories. When Milwaukee held school board elections last April, the Mayor's favorite candidates swept all of the teachers' union's candidates and gave the reformers a majority on the board.

He also knows how to run a government. In his time at Milwaukee's helm, Norquist streamlined the city bureaucracy, made the delivery of social services like snow plowing and garbage collection more efficient, and turned deficits into surpluses. At the same time, he has managed to cut taxes almost every year that he's been in office in an effort to halt middle-class flight to the suburbs. This has been successful, as more middle-class families are now moving into Milwaukee's reinvigorated downtown. And he has done this while preaching the gospel of urban independence from Washington and decrying the mentality of "tin cup federalism." (To his credit, Norquist is equally tough on businesses and has been highly critical of companies that try to stick their snouts in the government trough by demanding municipal subsidies). This is just the kind of track record that could help Al Gore neutralize George W. Bush's claim to be a "reformer with results." As University of Wisconsin political scientist Donald Kettl points out: "Norquist is a reformer with results, with more results to show."

To be sure, Norquist comes with political baggage. For one thing, the Gore camp is bound to be uneasy about Norquist's frosty relationship with the teachers' unions. Those unions are 3.5 million strong, claim one seventh of the delegates to the Democratic National Convention, and have been stalwart Gore supporters throughout his campaign. Both Norquist's policies and his attacks on the "public school monopoly" have done little to ingratiate him with the Our Miss Brooks set. In addition, some Milwaukee minority leaders argue that in his efforts to boost the middle class and business presence downtown, he has paid little attention to trying to increase investment in the city's poorer areas. This has angered some of Milwaukee's black community, and Norquist's electoral support among minorities has decreased since he was first elected in 1988.

But the key political fact about Norquist is that he's something of a maverick. According to David Meissner of the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, "John has challenged the stereotypical philosophies of the party. He is a cage rattler." And this may well be the most compelling reason for Gore to choose him as his running mate. Putting John Norquist on the ticket would send a strong signal that the Gore administration will be open to smart people and new ideas—even when they may be out of step with the party rank and file. Consider it the ultimate Sister Souljah move.

MARK MAZZETTI *is a correspondent for* The Economist.

Gore & Rubin 2000

BY MATTHEW MILLER

ROBERT RUBIN

He's smart and he's rich. He knows Wall Street and Washington. He helped build the longest economic boom on record. Even Republicans revere him. Yet the real reason Al Gore should pick Bob Rubin to be his vice president goes beyond the obvious: He's the one man in America who can make the world safe again for liberalism.

Why? Start with Rubin's temperament. Sure, he's cagey, or he couldn't have run Goldman Sachs or wowed them up and down Pennsylvania Avenue. Yet the man carries himself humbly. When I worked for Clinton in the early years, staffers loved to imitate the soft-spoken preface Rubin invariably offered in economic policy meetings. "Well, it's just one man's opinion," he would stammer, or, "I'm hardly an expert on this, but . . . " From a man of his stature, this brand of modesty, even if an act, set a tone that made it easier for high-powered egos to share credit and get things done. And if Rubin was sincere, why, so much the better: That's just the kind of mind you want near the helm in a fast-changing world.

Then there's Rubin's hyperrational, "probabilistic" approach to decision-making, best detailed in Jacob Weisberg's helpful 1998 profile in the *New York Times Magazine*. This isn't Robert McNamara's fatal belief in the ability of Reason to solve all human problems. It's more nearly the opposite: the trader's instinct for coping rationally with a crazed, unknowable world. Rubin's determination to coolly assess options and the likelihood of various outcomes sounds pretty elementary. But this sang-froid is rare and indispensable in crises (like the Asian meltdown) when the stakes are high and those around you are losing their heads. It's a quality he plainly thinks about: Rubin is the only former official I know who makes *the process of governmental decisionmaking* a central theme of his speeches. He urges citizens to judge

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officials not on the outcomes of their decisions, which often turn on unknowable intervening events, but on whether they wisely evaluated the information available at the time a decision had to be made. To judge otherwise, he argues, makes leaders too cautious too often.

This modest rationality is not what you ordinarily associate with Utopian liberal schemers. What makes Rubin's secret appeal so promising is that he'd pull Gore, and the country, to the left. Here's why. The main thing standing between America's current bounty and a sane run at LBJ's unfinished agenda is the Republican drive to use today's huge surpluses for a massive tax cut for the rich. Blocking that tax cut has been the chief aim of Clintonian maneuvering since 1997. George W. Bush has made that tax cut (a far bigger version, in fact, than Newt Gingrich dared offer) the centerpiece of his candidacy. The issue, as they say, has been joined.

If Gore picks Evan Bayh or Bob Graham or some other plain old pol, Bush will look credible arguing the merits of his plan. After all, what do these political lifers know about the real world? Now imagine a race in which, every day, Bob Rubin—the Democrat's super-meritocrat and economic trump card—quietly hammers George "It-was-all-handed-to-me-on-a-platter" Bush for having no understanding of what makes an economy work, while explaining that rich people like Bush and himself don't need a big tax cut when 44 million Americans are uninsured and urban schools are crumbling. When undecided voters take Rubin's side, they'll not only sweep the Dems into the White House, they'll vanquish the big-tax-cut crowd for good.

This rout will free Rubin to whisper to Gore that it's time (and safe) to think big. And he'll be ready: Rubin was the only treasury secretary in history, after all, with his own antipoverty agenda. He's a dreaded "limousine liberal," we're told by media heavies, who smirk when intoning the phrase, as if the awfulness of such a state were self-evident. But what's so bad about limousine liberals? Is the alternative—rich people (or pundits) who couldn't care less about poor people—really more "authentic" or attractive? It may not take a village to raise a child, but only a pro-business Democrat with a hundred million to spare is sufficiently bulletproof to persuade folks that its time to do more for those left behind.

Who else would approach Rubin's credibility when they argued, as he does, that the talent he served with in government matches or exceeds the talent he saw during decades at Goldman Sachs? That message, delivered from the veep's bully pulpit, would do more than a thousand handwringing think tank seminars to lure the best and brightest from dot-coms to public service.

Best of all, of course, Rubin is filthy rich, and thus free (under five justices' view of our Constitution) to spend as much as he likes on a Gore-Rubin ticket. With Bush opting out of federal election funding and its associated spending limits to plunder the GOP cash machine, Rubin's ability to plunk down $50 million could be decisive.

What else can you say? If Gore died Rubin would be a steady hand at the rudder. If markets wobbled he'd be the calmest voice in the storm. And the awkward financial man poses no threat to Gore's charisma gap. Rubin's sane enough to mean it when he says he's not suited to, and doesn't want, elected office. But a party can hope, can't it?

MATTHEW MILLER *is a syndicated columnist and a contributing editor of* The Washington Monthly.

Gore & Lieberman 2000

By David Brooks

JOSEPH LIEBERMAN

The Lord rested on the Sabbath, but it's impossible to imagine Al Gore doing so. The man is a political Clydesdale, his eyes straight ahead, pushing his way forward. As his handlers have discovered, his manner makes him effective on the attack—he is a bludgeoning machine—but it also makes him a little creepy. Why does he seem so intent even when he's supposed to be loose? This is why he needs Sen. Joseph Lieberman as his running mate. Sen. Lieberman does rest on the Sabbath, every Sabbath, because the Torah tells him to. He obviously has a life outside of politics. And it shows in his gentle demeanor and his reflective nature. Sen. Lieberman doesn't bring many electoral votes to the ticket, but he brings sensibility and balance. People actually like the more authentic Joe Lieberman. He seems like he'd be enjoyable company.

There are three things a presidential candidate needs from a vice presidential nominee. First, he needs him to energize the convention. Sen. Lieberman would do that. Democratic delegates would love the

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idea of putting a Jew a heartbeat away from the presidency. It's so Jackie Robinson! They'd be reminded that theirs is the party of civil rights and breaking down ethnic barriers. The press would love it too. There would be so much to write and talk about: the place of religion in society (a circulation builder), the ins and outs of orthodox Jewry, his wife, Hadassah, herself a dynamic personality. There would be endless ruminations on whether America is ready for a Jewish vice-president. I suspect we'd find it is. Remember, while Catholics and Protestants do not form cohesive voting blocks any more, highly religious people do. If you attend services weekly, whether Catholic, Protestant or Jewish, you are more likely to vote Republican. Lieberman would appeal to the highly religious of all faiths, and help the Democrats shake off their secularist tinge.

Second, the vice-president has to be effective in the televised debate. Can you imagine how difficult it would be for the Republican vice-presidential candidate to launch a vicious attack on the Democratic ticket with Joe Lieberman standing at the other podium? The man exudes civility and makes anybody who goes on the attack look like a rabid dog by comparison. How would the Republican raise the issue of the Clinton sleaze? Lieberman was one of the chief Democratic critics of Clinton sleaze. By joining the Gore ticket he'd be a step toward putting the party beyond all that. Of course, Lieberman wouldn't be much good at attacking the Republican ticket. But with Al Gore at the top of the ticket, the Democrats don't need another hatchet man.

Third, if a Gore/Lieberman ticket were elected, the vice-president would raise the tone of the White House. These days, administrations seem to be staffed by more and more ruthless political players. Once Democratic operatives decided they were going to be as hardball as Lee Atwater, they adopted bare-knuckle tactics with the fervor of converts. The Clinton scandals were all magnified because the Clintonistas lied so blatantly and ruthlessly assaulted their accusers. The counterattack was often more revolting than the crime. Lieberman would at least serve as a hall monitor for all those thrusting 27-year-olds who now seem to run White Houses.

Gore doesn't have a lot of great choices when it comes to vice-presidential picks. There aren't a lot of Democratic governors anymore, or even a lot of promising Democratic senators. But there is one outstanding pick—the guy in the yarmulke.

DAVID BROOKS *is a senior editor at* The Weekly Standard.

Gore & Rendell 2000

Peter Nicholas

ED RENDELL

At one of his final news conferences as mayor of Philadelphia, Ed Rendell was asked if he might like to be vice president of the United States.

A few seconds passed. His eyes glistened. Maybe he was thinking back to a time when the idea would have been ludicrous—that point in the mid-1980s when he had lost successive campaigns for governor and mayor and his once promising political career appeared to have collapsed. But a lot had changed since then. Philadelphia had recovered and so had Rendell.

After two terms as the hugely popular mayor of a city that at one time couldn't pay its bills, Rendell's career possibilities seemed limitless: governor, cabinet secretary, and beyond. And why not? Al Gore himself had given Rendell the ultimate tribute, dubbing him, "America's Mayor." "Do I want to be vice president?" Rendell asked softly in a City Hall reception room decorated with formal portraits of mayors past. Damn right he does.

The Rendell story sells. A gutsy, plain-spoken mayor in the New Democratic mold takes office in the early 1990s. Philadelphia is near bankruptcy. Its bonds have sunk to junk status. Even more worrisome, the city's self-image is suffering and its national profile isn't much better. It wasn't so long ago that police dropped a bomb on an anarchic cult called MOVE, incinerating a rowhouse neighborhood under the watch of former mayor W. Wilson Goode. Rendell wastes no time. He gets down on his hands and knees and scours a toilet in dingy City Hall.

He announces that the city is broke. Determined to cut spending, he wrings wage concessions from a municipal workforce that, he says, hasn't had "a bad day for 30 years." He balances the budget; ratchets down an oppressive wage tax; promotes Philadelphia tirelessly, luring hotels and restaurants and reinventing the city as a tourist destination, a center of culture and arts and sports and entertainment. The mayor's optimism proves infectious. Philadelphians begin to believe.

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Through it all, Rendell has the time of his life. He opens a municipal swimming pool by stripping down to his trunks and leaping in—hairy back and all. When he leaves office in January 2000, his approval rating is through the roof. He moves to his next assignment, general chairman of the Democratic National Committee, where he becomes one of his party's chief fund-raisers and spokesmen.

"Here's a guy who said it's the cities' responsibility to right their ship rather than expect the rest of America to pull them along," said Randall Miller, a history professor at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. "He was America's Mayor, and he didn't have the hard edge that Giuliani had in doing that. He could sell the idea of the city. He could sell Philadelphia and he could do it with enormous good cheer."

It's a story with a few holes. The city continued to hemorrhage population under Rendell. Thousands of middle-class families left for the suburbs, unwilling to enroll their children in a foundering public school system that never got the mayor's full attention. After eight years of America's Mayor, Philadelphia's thriving core was ringed by abandoned cars, vacant lots, and crumbling houses. Still, for a public fed up with Washington insiders, with government paralyzed by infighting, Rendell could be packaged as a fresh-faced antidote.

"Al Gore needs someone who is not Washington," said David L. Cohen, Rendell's close friend, former campaign manager, and chief of staff. "Al Gore is quintessential Washington, and I don't think he wants to choose another senator or congressman. It would be better for him to have someone from outside of Washington, and that means you look at governors and mayors. And if you look at successful governors or mayors, Ed Rendell has to be at the top of your list."

Don't discount geography. Pennsylvania is a vital swing state in the general election, its cache of 23 electoral votes coveted by both Gore and George W. Bush. California will probably go Democrat; Texas, Republican. But Pennsylvania is in play. If there is any doubt about the state's importance, look how seriously the Bush camp is considering Pennsylvania's GOP governor, Tom Ridge. Rendell is a behemoth in the populous eastern part of the state. He won re-election in 1995 with 77 percent of the vote. As a bonus, Rendell is well-known in parts of New Jersey (15 electoral votes) and in Delaware (3), where he has appeared often on TV.

"The battleground states are going to be states in the Northeast and Midwest that have traditional big-city constituencies," said Thomas Leonard, a Philadelphia attorney and fund-raiser for the Democratic Party. "A lot of ethnics; a lot of city-oriented voters." He added: "Rendell therefore becomes attractive as a successful big-city mayor who gets along with organized labor but was tough enough to stand up to them and turn a city around financially."

As a campaigner, Rendell would nicely complement Gore. Where Gore is stiff, Rendell is natural. Where Gore looks scripted, Rendell is spontaneous. The ex-mayor avoids jargon and has a gift for connecting with his audience. A lawyer by training, a politician by instinct, Rendell's speeches are an amalgam of logic and passion. He isn't afraid to cry in public, especially when the subject turns to parent and child. Rendell was 14 when his own father, a middleman in New York's garment district, died of a heart attack.

None of this is to say Gore-Rendell is the dream ticket. Though his administration was largely free of scandal, Rendell can expect renewed attention to his private life should he be nominated for the vice presidency. Rendell, who is married to a federal judge, can be flirtatious with women. He has been dogged by rumors of extra-marital affairs. Is the country ready for that after Bill Clinton? Cohen sees a difference. First, he said he doesn't believe Rendell has been unfaithful. The best efforts of enterprising reporters have come up empty, and Clinton's troubles are of a different magnitude.

Then there's religion. Rendell is Jewish. Gore has a chance to shatter the religion barrier by picking Rendell. But is the country ready for a Jewish vice president? Ancient prejudice may be the one obstacle this most nimble of politicians can't surmount.

PETER NICHOLAS *is a reporter at the* Philadelphia Inquirer.

Gore 2000

Five other possible candidates the *Monthly* holds in high regard:

BRUCE BABBITT

Barney Frank

Henry Cisneros

... and a suggestion that intrigued some of our friends—and us:

Tom Brokaw

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4:30 p.m. – Lecture by Sam Engel, MD

5:30 p.m. – Q & A Session – Closing Remarks

6:00 p.m. – BASKETBALL GAME!!!!!

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You Still Need A Blackboard

What's right and wrong with the charter schools

By Jonathan Schorr

A few months ago, Bill Clinton stood before Congress and the new millennium to deliver his State of the Union address. Turning to the subject that now seems to trump all others—education—he noted that when he took office, there was only one charter school "in all America," and that now there are 1,700. He challenged the nation to speed that growth even further, raising the number of such independent public schools by next year to 3,000.

If he'd chatted with Alexis Adorador, he might have thought about taking things a bit more slowly.

On a recent Thursday afternoon, Ms. Adorador, a counselor and administrator at the Oakland Charter Academy, was not counseling any students. She was alone in her office gripping a cordless phone, trying to transform herself into a tax expert.

Her middle school, which serves 175 mostly Spanish-speaking students, was one of America's first charter schools. It had a long string of luck finding cheap space in which to hold classes, but last year, that luck ran out. The school's good fortune began when it opened in 1993, under a $1 per year lease from the local Catholic diocese. That gift, however, was intended only to help the school get started, and was limited to two years. When the lease ran out, in 1995, it came time to move the marine-gray trailers that serve as classrooms. Still under a lucky star, the school landed another sweetheart arrangement: a parcel in an industrial park, heavily subsidized by the local port authority, for only $25,000 per year. Granted, the new home amid the factories and stacks of shipping containers, walking distance from nowhere, had its drawbacks. Indeed, to an outsider, the ramshackle portable school, with no gymnasium, lunchroom, or stage, might have seemed the picture of ghetto deprivation. But as odd as the setting appeared, some parents and teachers enjoyed the isolation, and the trailers seemed to fit right in.

Like all good things, however, the school's charmed lease on life had to end, and last summer the bank foreclosed on the school's industrial park landlord. With little cash to spare, the school's supporters made numerous pleas for a cheap building, or a deal directly with the bank, or at least a lot where they could put their nomadic trailers. The search came to naught, and they finally found a home—too small and far too expensive—ironically in a defunct bank branch near the school's first site. Now, from a total budget of about $800,000, the school must make $65,000 quarterly payments on a $200,000 renovation debt, plus pay $6,000 in monthly rent. (The rent will climb steadily to $10,000 per month by 2002.) Because California doesn't provide a dime to charter schools for space, all of that comes out of the same funds that would otherwise pay for books, materials, and teacher salaries. As a result, the school pays its teachers between $2,000 and $7,000 less per year than the surrounding Oakland district, which itself has some of the lowest salaries in the area. Amid a serious statewide teacher shortage, the pay scale is a desperate handicap in recruiting skilled teachers. Likewise, the massive payout for the building has cut funding for books and other essentials nearly to zero.

"We have spent every last nickel on this facility," Adorador laments. "I think we bought one set of math books [this year]. We have not bought instructional materials." And now, to add insult to injury, the renovation has increased the value of the building—and with it the school's property tax bill. But the school is probably eligible for an exemption from the tax, much of which goes, of course, to fund schools. So rather

Jonathan Schorr *is an education writer, former teacher and fellow of the Open Society Institute. He is writing a book on inner-city charter schools.*

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than counseling kids, Adorador is on the phone with an advisor in the Mayor's office. "I'm trying to figure out how to become a commercial real estate agent and get an exemption," she grumbles. "What's typical about it is, charter schools always have staffs that are working outside their expertise."

Growing Pains

Adorador's situation highlights the gap between the vast expectations policy makers and parents hold for charter schools, and the real struggles these courageous upstarts face in trying to survive. These schools present remarkable opportunities for experimentation in the classroom, and for bringing families into their children's educational life. But as with all serious, complex problems, the woes of education do not invite quick, cheap fixes. Where charter schools are marketed as a magic wand that rapidly and unfailingly will produce well-educated kids and big-system reform, they are being grossly oversold. Charter schools have the potential to enliven the debate, and perhaps to restore hope for public schooling at a time when faith in that notion is waning. But anyone who sees these vogue, anti-bureaucratic schools as an easy way to fundamentally change American education ought to take a hard look at some of the barriers these schools face.

Charter schools are taxpayer-funded, but live outside the constraints of a school district. Except for a handful of basic safety rules, most of the regulations don't apply. Instead of promising to adhere to a Byzantine state education code and the local school board's directives, charter schools promise results, in a document called a charter. Yet such schools must abide by the basic tenets that put the "public" in public schools: They cannot inculcate religion, cannot charge tuition, and must accept any child who shows up, space permitting. It's a notion that appeals across the spectrum, from conservative philanthropists who seek escape from a hidebound bureaucracy to teachers who yearn for the simplicity and warmth of a one-room schoolhouse, or a place to try new ideas. Charter schools are a blank slate for our educational fantasies; they are, as the title of one good primer puts it, "a public school of your own."

In public discourse, people talk about charter schools the way they do IPO's for Internet startups: They don't know much about what they are or how they work, but they like them a lot, and would like to be part of one. In a Public Agenda survey last summer, 81 percent of Americans said they knew very little or nothing about charter schools, and fully 89 percent said they would need to learn more before forming an opinion about them. Yet given a one-sentence explanation, more than two-thirds came out in favor of charter schools, and the majority said they would seriously consider sending their own children there.

In keeping with the Internet comparison, charters are multiplying at a prodigious rate, despite the lack of substantial hard information on their results. The first charter school opened in 1992, and by the end of the year there were two. The next two years added 98 new schools, and the next two years, 332. The growth curve is still steepening, with more than 820 new schools created over the last two years, for a current total around 1,700. Today, a quarter of a million American children in 32 states and the District of Columbia attend a type of school that did not exist a decade ago.

Each of those states has passed separate legislation setting rules for who can grant a charter, how many schools can open, and how much money a charter school receives per student. (Typically, it's somewhat less than the regular public schools). Those varying conditions have created widely different numbers of schools in each state, from 222 in Arizona and 210 in California to one each in Mississippi and Nevada. A large majority of charter schools are brand-new institutions, but 18 percent are converted from previously existing public schools, and 10 percent from existing private schools. Charters present a vibrant array of approaches and reasons for being, from the need to serve a particular population—frequently "at-risk students"—to an unusual philosophy of education, to a desire for greater parent involvement or discipline. And while charters vary widely in style, a large majority cite the pursuit of an alternative vision as a reason for their founding.

The Story

The word "charter" dates to 1292 and the Magna Carta, and attaching it to this new brand of school was a brilliant stroke of nomenclature. The most literal meaning of the word is a document incorporating a university; the term was first used in that sense in 1474, in reference to the creation of Oxford and Cambridge. But its original meaning, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is "a written document delivered by the sovereign or legislature granting privileges to, or recognizing the rights of, the people." And it is that sense that best describes the ambitions of early advocates. The charter notion sprang from the ideas of school and government reformers and supporters of alternative schools. If there was a common theme to their organic coalition, it was that the "monopoly" of local school districts over the creation of public schools

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should be broken, and that the resulting competition would be good for all. Families could choose among public schools, carrying their public education funds with them. Meanwhile, education by charter meant that if a school did not fulfill its promises, it could be closed—a clear incentive to perform. At its most modest, the philosophy held that the rivalry from charters would push districts to improve in order to hold on to students—and their funding. At its most ambitious, the hope was that a system mired in bureaucracy would never be able to compete effectively with these creative, efficient little startups, and that most or all children would end up in charter schools. Still other educators visualized "boutique" schools that, outside a centrally managed bureaucracy, would serve as laboratories for curricula and techniques, the best of which would find their way back to the system.

In a time of growing calls for change in public education, charter schools have proved a potent idea. True, some have viewed charter schools with suspicion, fearing that they will drain off resources and energy from the system serving most of the kids, and from efforts to reform that system. But policy makers and politicians throughout the country have found charter schools to be a hot ticket. (Charter schools aren't just for Democrats; George W. Bush, saying he wants "to fan the spark of charter schools into a flame," has called for an additional 2,000 charter schools and $3 billion in loan guarantees to them. Brother Jeb Bush, the Florida governor, founded a charter in Miami three years ago.) Education reformers who believe that the key to school improvement lies in family and community involvement are naturally drawn to homegrown charter schools. Moreover, as support grows for vouchers—which would allow parents to take public funds to private and religious schools—charter schools have gained cachet as an innovative school choice option that remains entirely public. And quietly, educators who see teachers' unions as part of the reason for stasis have taken to charters, which usually do not participate in collective bargaining.

Have charter schools fulfilled their promise? In the realm of academic performance, it's far too early to say; most of the schools now in existence opened in the last two years. Moreover, it would be folly ever to try to draw broad-brush conclusions about a movement characterized by the uniqueness of its members, which range from diversion programs for jail-bound teenagers to Montessori-type preschools. Currently, much of what passes for evaluation are the passionate claims and counterclaims of charter advocates and critics. But there are encouraging stories and trends that demonstrate the power of the charter idea—and they are nearly certain to be used to support driving the charter concept too far, too fast.

First, charter schools, on average, are much smaller than other public schools, with an average enrollment of 137, as compared to 475 in regular schools. That fact alone is worthy of careful attention. There's evidence that lots of things—from academic achievement to safety—work better when the school is small enough that every adult knows every child. (The rich, it's often noted, have figured this out: When was the last time you heard of a large expensive private school?) And charter schools have, on average, a better teacher-student ratio than regular public schools. Another encouraging trend: Contrary to early fears, charter schools are enrolling disproportionately high numbers of poor and ethnic minority children (although that's not true in every state). Nationally, charter schools enrolled the same proportion of students with limited English as did other public schools, although charters enrolled substantially fewer special-education students. Clearly, there's something parents like about charter schools; 70 percent of the charters now in existence have waiting lists to enroll.

Successful charter schools are getting noticed. Massachusetts newspapers, for instance, have been crammed with accolades for Neighborhood House, a small school in the Dorchester area of Boston. The school is an example of exactly the sort of excellent, creative work that can be done when freedom with education is placed in capable hands with strong community support. Neighborhood House, a warm, comfortable school with 180 elementary-age children, was founded by the local settlement house network, which has long worked to ease the transition of new immigrants. Its mostly black, mostly poor students enjoy classes with 18 children—and two teachers. The school serves as a center for health care, social services, adult education, and after-school activities, and families can take advantage of a parent center, whose coordinator also conducts home visits. The school reports an impressive 97 percent attendance rate and zero expulsions. But it's not the welcoming air and the wealth of services that have drawn notice—it's the test scores. On recent statewide exams, the school had the No. 1 fourth-grade score in Massachusetts in English and language arts, and Boston's highest scores in math and science.

It seems safe to say that Neighborhood House and standouts like it will become part of charter advocates' arsenal. And rightly so, since it was in part the school's unusual freedom in budgeting and hiring that made its

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success possible. But it's worth noting that while some of the highest scores in Boston belonged to charter schools, some of the very lowest ones did, too. Charter schools have a lot to offer in the hard fight to make education better, especially in the places where it now is most clearly failing. But this fledgling movement faces some very real barriers, and still has an awful lot to figure out.

Reality Bites

As highlighted by the Oakland Charter Academy experience, the lack of facilities, and of public funding for buildings, will combine to put sharp limits on the number of new schools. Although some states hold charter schools to more lenient standards than other schools on building safety, few offer much in the way of funding for charter school buildings. (Regular public schools, by contrast, are generally supported by government bond issues.) The result is that even when suitable buildings can be found—often a tall order in the inner city—the charter school must either get the building for free or find a deep-pocketed donor if it hopes to avoid cutting deeply into instructional funds. For the Edison Schools, one of the largest operators of charters in the country, the facilities problem poses the No. 1 challenge. "Finding and financing, that combination is a gigantic barrier," says Joe Keeney, Edison's vice president for real estate. Even where parents and school boards are ready to start a school, he says, "we walk away from some deals because we can't make

Who's Who

By Susan Threadgill

According to *The Hill*'s "Open Secrets" column, Sen. **Bob Graham** removed himself from **Al Gore**'s vice presidential list when he accused **Bill Clinton** of lying by promising Graham that the feds would not use a night-time raid to snatch **Elian Gonzalez**. (For other Democratic vice-presidential possibilities, see page 8 of this issue.) On the Republican side, Sen. **Fred Thompson** is said to have hurt his vice-presidential chances when his name was linked romantically to that of **Margaret Carlson**. The *Time* columnist and "Capital Gang" regular is reportedly too liberal for **George W. Bush**. Thompson's standing was not enhanced when gossips said he was simultaneously involved with another woman.

Dick Cheney, who served as secretary of defense under **Daddy Bush** and White House chief of staff under **Gerald Ford**, is leading W.'s vice-presidential search. Former Secretary of State **Warren Christopher** is playing the same role for **Al Gore**. Christopher did it for Bill Clinton in 1992, offering the job first to another senator and then, when he turned it down, to Gore.

We may have done **George W. Bush** an injustice when we suggested (see "Who's Who," April 2000) that he was attracted to the Gin and Tonic society at Yale because of his proclivity for partying. A Yalie of that era tells us that Gin and Tonic was one of a number of alternative societies formed in rebellion against the elite networking that Skull and Bones and other traditional secret societies represented. The name, he explains, was intended as a parody, as was that of another alternative society called Crotch and Armpit.

Al Gore is an exercise freak. "He travels with a set of dumbbells that are so heavy a 6-foot-7-inch advance man has trouble lugging the canvas bag they are packed in," reports **Bob Davis** of the *Wall Street Journal*. "The Secret Service sometimes cordons off a hotel's gym so Gore can work out alone. Other times the vice president asks that his hotel room have a treadmill and a weight bench." All of this and his tight clothes, Republicans say, is to appeal to female voters. "The biggest swing vote is women," GOP strategist **Scott Reed** told the *Journal*. "If Gore has to wear t-shirts, he'll do it." Some in the Gore camp say that their candidate is just a "regular guy who is clueless about his appearance," but one aide compares him to **Teddy Roosevelt**, "who posed barrel-chested in photos to project virility and vitality."

Steve Largent, the former pro football star who is now a Republican congressman from Oklahoma, recently compared the tax code to a wife. Speaking on the floor of the House, Largent said, "What we're saying is the tax code is like a wife. It's so ugly, you know you can do better."

Bill Clinton has been poking fun at himself recently. In case you haven't heard the latest round of jokes, at the radio and television correspondents' dinner, he said his

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it work." Absent the facilities problem, he added, "we would be able to do a lot more and we'd be able to serve a lot more children." That fact alone should chasten anyone who envisions cities suddenly transformed by a raft of startup charter schools. And even among charter schools now open, one in three reports having an inadequate facility.

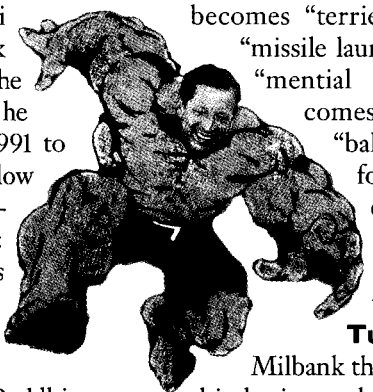
Perhaps more important, from an academic standpoint at least, is the fact that a ticket out of a dysfunctional bureaucracy is not the same as a free pass to educational nirvana. Like awkward new hatchlings, many young charter schools are struggling to get on their feet, and students at these nascent schools are not always doing better than their counterparts in the schools they left. In places where education is working most poorly—the inner cities and the poor rural areas—charter schools are demonstrating just how tough it is to create educational excellence. Yes, there are wonderful examples of what can be done with the most careful planning and the most creative, demanding leadership. And yes, many charter schools in tough areas have achieved victories in non-academic areas such as safety. But in journalistic, academic, and other reports from the field, one account after another demonstrates the difficulty of trying to make new curricula and new ways of sharing power work—all in a brand-new school that is figuring out for the first time how to keep track of attendance; instill discipline; feed children; salve their illnesses and wounds; respond to parent complaints; clean, maintain, and secure a building; file for state and

favorite slogan for the **Al Gore** campaign was "Al Gore—because there's a 22nd Amendment." Then at the White House correspondents' dinner in late April, he told the crowd, "I'm not concerned with my memoirs—I'm concerned with my resume. I've been getting a lot of tips on how to write it, mostly from my staff. They really seem to be up on this stuff. They tell me I have to use the active voice. You know, things like: 'Commanded U.S. armed forces,' 'Ordered air strikes,' 'Served three terms as president.'" [Pause.] "Everybody embellishes a little."

What else? "Designed, built and painted bridge to 21st Century," Clinton continued. "Supervised vice president's invention of the Internet." And finally: "Generated, attracted, heightened, and maintained controversy."

Who's creating this material? We hear it's a speechwriter named **Mark Katz**.

What kind of fellow is **Al Gore**'s foreign policy advisor, **Leon Fuerth**? He has a passion for anonymity—he says his goal is to be "nameless, faceless, and odorless." He is definitely pro-Israel. "During Mr. Gore's unsuccessful bid for the Democratic nomination for president," writes **Elaine Sciolino** of *The New York Times*, "Mr. Fuerth helped him formulate an uncritical pro-Israeli line." He is a hawk and usually urges the hard line, as when he advised Gore in 1991 to break with fellow Democrats to support the Gulf War. His political sense is not keen—he told Gore it was okay to attend that fundraising luncheon in a Buddhist temple. But Gore likes him—a lot. Even though he has a rule against naming his future White House advisers, he told Sciolino, "If I were to break that rule for anybody, it would be for Leon."



Dana Milbank of *The Washington Post* may have discovered the secret of **George W. Bush**speak. There's a part of the brain called Broca's area that Milbank says "directs the production of clear and intelligible speech." The wires between the Broca's area of the governor's brain and his mouth may be twisted or crossed or perhaps both. Whatever the reason, it is clear that Bush's Broca's area is not getting its message across in the intended form. Thus "tariffs and barriers" becomes "terriers and bariffs," "missile launches" turns into "mental losses," "viable" comes out "vile," and "balkanize" is transformed into "vulcanize." Bush aides aren't worried. Spokeswoman **Mindy Tucker** assures Milbank that it's all "because his brain works faster than his mouth does."

If you felt **Al Gore** was pandering in urging that the **Elian Gonzalez** case be resolved in Family Court, consider that he resisted the advice of his chief guru, **Tony Coelho**, and lieutenant gurus, **Bob Shrum** and **Carter Eskew**, who recommended that Elian immediately be granted permanent residency in the U.S. Coelho has knocked off rivals **Jack Quinn**, **Ron Klain**, **Peter Knight**, **Mark Penn**, **Craig Smith**, and **Marla Romash**. Insiders say Gore might be the next to go.

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federal funds and write grants; translate each memo into a second language; set up computers; balance a budget, and do all those other myriad tasks people don't think about when they imagine running a school is easy. And remember that unless they win special grants (which fortunately are becoming more plentiful), charter schools have no way to pay their staff for the extensive, crucial planning before the school opens. Without such extra time, educators fall back on what they already know, and a remarkable opportunity for innovation is lost.

Charter schools also face special challenges that they create for themselves—for all the right reasons—over who exactly is in charge. Frequently, especially in the inner city, parents and teachers, fed up with an unresponsive, hierarchical bureaucracy, combine to build their own school. Only in the later stages do they hire a "professional" principal (sometimes termed a "site director" or "administrator") to "run" the program. But typically the school has its own board, which theoretically holds ultimate power, and the parents and teachers, especially those who founded the school, also expect and get plenty of authority. When tough decisions on money and on hiring and firing have to be made, the question of who's really in charge can lead to chaos, disillusionment and major turnover in families and staff.

In the relationship between charter schools and the larger system, charter schools also have yet to achieve the goals envisioned for them. First, there are questions about whether charter schools are being held to that favorite educational buzzword, accountability. In kicking off charter schools week, President Clinton said this month that "charter schools must set and meet the highest standards, and they can remain open only as long as they do so." But in her highly critical and controversial 1998 study on 17 California charters, University of California, Los Angeles researcher Amy Stuart Wells reported that, generally, the schools were not held accountable for achieving the academic goals and standards they set in their charters. In a finding that mirrors criticisms of school districts, Wells reported that financial problems might get a charter school in trouble, but academic shortfalls generally won't. (So far, only 59 charter schools, or 4 percent of the total, have closed for any reason.) Wells also found that there's not much of a mechanism right now for innovations from charter schools to make their way to regular public schools, and that the sense that charters have unfair advantages has inhibited regular schools' willingness to "compete." It comes as little surprise, then, that researchers have found only about a quarter of school districts changing vigorously in response to the advent of charter schools in their area.

Making A Good School

So what is to be done? The challenge places itself squarely before the many politicians who are making charter schools central to their electoral platforms. It seems sometimes that by uttering the two-word mantra, politicians believe they have taken care of their constituents' most urgent and complex concern. That's not good enough. Charter schools face hurdles that will limit their growth, preventing them from being a large-scale solution anytime soon. Moreover, as appealing as it may sound, it's simply false to suggest that cutting educators loose from bureaucracy is all that it will take to create excellent schools. It will require time and attention to make these schools the models of public education success that they ought to be.

Currently, policy makers are exhorting the schools to compete, but sending charters to the race hobbled. How does a school like Oakland Charter compete when it cannot buy books or pay its teachers even the pittance they would make at the school down the street? How does a charter school develop an innovative curriculum and a cohesive structure if the first dollar arrives only after the children do? The federal government has taken good steps toward resolving this quandary, giving away $100 million last year in grants to charter schools; for next year, Clinton is asking for $175 million. That's a start, but if we are to accept the language of competition, it's not enough to level the playing field. States ought to make facilities funding available to charter schools as they do to any other school.

But such generosity should not be a gift to charter schools. In return for improved funding, charters should be expected to produce evidence of excellent planning. It should not be the case—as it sometimes seems now in certain states—that only a grossly incompetent charter gets rejected. Making a good school takes deep forethought, creative ideas, and vigorous teachers supported by high-quality, continual training. Charters ought to be held to tough standards, just as children should, with revisions required until the plan is extensive and solid. If giving such discretion to school boards lets anti-charter boards just say no to everyone, governors can create a fair-minded state board of charter appeals. And if a tougher process holds down the total number of new charters, perhaps that's not a bad thing. Lest charter advocates cry foul, they should remember that they are the ones hurt worst by lousy charter schools—worst, that is, after the kids. ●

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Reasonable Doubts

Crime's down but the system's broken: The Monthly*'s guide to criminal justice reform*

By Stephen Pomper

CRIME MAY BE DOWN BUT THE CRIMINAL justice system remains something of a mess. If you've ever spent time on a jury, if you've worked in a criminal court, or if you caught even 10 minutes of the O.J. trial on TV, you've seen some of the problems. The system has an Alice-in-Wonderland quality: The guilty are over-protected, the innocent are under-served, and much of the time the public interest simply fails to enter the picture. Jurors spend days in court dozing through endless delays and witnesses who dare come forward find their lives imperiled. When all is said and done, too many violent and dangerous felons wind up with Get-Out-of-Jail-Free cards and too many non-violent and just-plain-innocent people wind up doing time.

How do we make it better? Read on for the *Monthly*'s guide to criminal justice reform.

Get the Truth Out

Courts are supposed to be finders of fact. Yet there's an awful lot about the criminal justice system that keeps them from ever getting to those facts. Some of the obstacles are straight-forwardly bad laws. Others are more a question of resources and oversight. We could help our courts get past some of these obstacles and here's how:

1. End "Two Wrongs Make a Right" Criminal Procedure: The judicial system labors under rules crafted by the Warren Court, which protect defendants even if it's at the expense of the truth. In a 1997 law review article, University of Minnesota law professor Michael Stokes Paulsen casts this as the "Dirty Harry" problem. In the movie of the same name, Detective Harry Callaghan gets increasingly violent as he goes after a serial murderer named "Scorpio." He busts into his place without a warrant, nabs the murder rifle, and savages Scorpio until he spits out the location of a kidnap/rape/murder victim. But here's the kicker: Although Scorpio is a monster, and Harry does some monstrous things, neither of them is actually punished. Scorpio goes free because all the evidence against him is tainted by Harry's antics, and Harry slides by because cops get away with stuff.

Decades later, this lose-lose approach is still at the heart of criminal procedure. To be sure, the failing has noble origins. Back in the Civil Rights era, the Supreme Court, concerned about segregationist states deploying policemen to harass and imprison minorities, developed a set of constitutional principles that stopped them from doing that: Ill-gotten evidence was treated like fruit from a poisoned tree and had to be discarded. If the police ransacked your car without a warrant, the resulting evidence could not be produced at trial.

But the days of officially-sponsored police racism are over. And while there's still racism and police abuse on a different scale, it's hard to see why they are best dealt with by excluding otherwise helpful evidence. It's one thing to say that forced confessions should not be considered: That protects innocent people who might be beaten into confessing crimes they did not commit. But what kind of protection does an innocent person get from an "exclusionary rule" that prevents a court from considering ill-gotten evidence? If Harry busts into an innocent person's apartment and doesn't find anything to seize, then there won't be any evidence for a court to exclude, and there won't be any negative consequence for the police. Not that exclusion is such a negative consequence anyway: when police are evaluated in cities like New York, the emphasis is on the number

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of arrests to their credit—not convictions. If Scorpio goes free because Harry trashes his place, Harry still may be eligible for a promotion.

Part of the problem with the exclusionary rule is that it assumes that the Bill of Rights is focused on protecting the guilty rather than the innocent. But some leading constitutional scholars have begun to suggest that this assumption is backwards—protecting the innocent is in fact the top priority. The correct way to control police abuse is not by tossing potentially useful evidence onto the compost pile. It is by punishing the policeman or the police department through a lawsuit or through criminal charges. But the court should, by all means, be allowed to consider Scorpio's rifle and any other relevant evidence that Harry has managed to dig up.

In 1995 Congress considered a bill that would have gone in this direction—by getting rid of the exclusionary rule and making it easier to sue delinquent cops—but it fizzled. Supporters of the status quo argue that it doesn't really matter: There are so many exceptions to the exclusionary rule that only a small percentage of arrests are lost as a result. They also argue that the rule is useful because it provides at least some check on police abuse—and that creating an alternate system of checks would be a real challenge. This, however, ignores the problems in the current system. Read the recent coverage about the Los Angeles and New York police departments and you will see that the exclusionary rule is not an especially effective mechanism for controlling police brutality. Meanwhile, courts and lawyers waste their time on motions to suppress evidence that can only undermine the truth-seeking process.

Getting to the truth should be the court's foremost objective. And this principle doesn't apply just to the exclusionary rule. For example, a majority of states have deadlines after which a convict cannot introduce new evidence to prove his innocence. In Virginia, the deadline is a scant 21 days after trial. The idea is to keep appeals from dragging out endlessly, but that's not a good rationale for keeping innocent people in jail. If a convict can present credible new evidence, then a court should review it. But if a case reopens for this reason and the state has come up with new evidence of guilt, the court should look at that too.

It's time to end the lose-lose cycle that we create by excluding evidence. A court must get the information it needs to send Scorpio to Alcatraz. If he can prove his innocence later, it must hear the evidence it needs to spring him. And the Harrys of this world must pay for their brutality through some mechanism that punishes them directly—rather than one that punishes the community by putting guilty people back on the street.

2. *Create a Universal DNA Database.* This is an idea that Rudy Giuliani has endorsed and the ACLU has said could usher in a "brave new world" of genetic discrimination—but looking past the rhetoric, it's a winner.

The idea is to take full advantage of the enormous power of DNA evidence. Because it's so much more reliable at identifying people than eyewitnessing, DNA evidence can keep innocent people from going to death row and guilty people from going free. And because it is such powerful proof, it can help shorten trials, relieve problems with witness intimidation, and generally lend itself to a more efficient and reliable criminal justice system. But in order to maximize its usefulness, you need to be able to check crime scene DNA samples against the biggest possible database. The government is already coordinating a database that will include mostly convicted felons' DNA samples. That's a decent start: Convicted felons have a high probability of returning to their old ways when released from prison. Still, plenty of crime is committed by people who have never spent time behind bars. So why not do it right and create a database that includes everybody?

The idea is simple and non-discriminatory. Upon the birth of any child, a hospital would take a DNA sample using a simple procedure that involves swabbing cells off the inside of a cheek with a bit of cotton and then analyzing their genetic material for patterns at 13 separate points, called loci. The information recorded at these loci is referred to as "junk" by geneticists because it doesn't say anything interesting about whether a person is likely to be an insurance risk, is likely to win a Nobel Prize, is a cat or a dog person, or anything of the sort. Like a fingerprint, it would simply identify who a person is. This information would be sent to a federal database where it could be used only by law enforcement authorities when trying to establish the identity of a criminal.

Civil libertarians get hysterical over the privacy issues, but where's the beef? Given the restricted information that we're talking about, and the limited access that would be afforded, the main privacy right at stake is the right to commit crimes anonymously. It's also worth noting that millions of hospital patients leave blood and tissue samples when they come for treatment. Some hospitals keep these

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on file. So if your local homicide chief decides that he wants to get a DNA profile on you, he may very well be able to go down to City General, retrieve some old cells of yours, and do his own genetic analysis. This analysis could wind up furnishing information that is much more sensitive than the information that would be recorded in the national database. Wouldn't it be preferable to require the police to limit their DNA sleuthing to one tightly controlled source?

One more point on DNA evidence: It can help us correct past mistakes, and we should use it to do so. States should be required to take DNA samples from all convicts in all cases where it could prove their innocence and the prisoner wants it. Given that no fewer than 67 prisoners have already been found innocent using DNA testing, states should be working overtime to find other innocents who have been wrongly imprisoned. The flip side of this position is that states and courts should do whatever it takes to make certain that statutes of limitations don't stop victims and prosecutors from going after violent offenders where DNA technology for the first time allows guilt to be established.

Although Scorpio is a monster, and Harry does monstrous things, neither of them is punished.

3. Save the Witnesses. If you watch too many movies of the week, you can get a highly distorted view of what this country does to protect its witnesses. There is a romantic idea that once you agree to testify in a dangerous case, the FBI rushes in with a team of plastic surgeons, draws up new papers, and moves you to the furthest corner of the furthest possible state—where it continues to keep a watchful eye on you for the rest of your natural born days. But there's a problem: The FBI program is for federal witnesses—it was designed to help U.S. attorneys bust up organized crime. It doesn't do a thing to help out at the state and local levels where most crime, and most witness intimidation, occurs.

And a shocking amount of witness intimidation does occur at those levels. According to a 1995 report published by the National Institute of Justice (their latest on this subject), some prosecutors were able to identify gang-dominated neighborhoods where between 75 and 100 percent of violent crimes involved intimidation—from knee capping potential witnesses to staring them down in court to actually rubbing them out. That's an unsettling figure when you consider that a court's fact-finding machinery can grind to a halt without witnesses.

Consider the following example: A Baltimore jury recently acquitted three men who had been accused of shooting one Shawn L. Suggs in a street fight that spilled out into rush hour traffic. At first, the prosecution seemed to have a good case—but then the key witnesses started dropping out of the picture: The first was killed in his home. Another disappeared without a trace. And the third (Suggs' former girlfriend) claimed at the last moment to have lost her memory to heroin addiction. "I think she is afraid to tell the truth," Suggs' mother told the *Baltimore Sun*. "I think I would be afraid too."

How do you fight that kind of fear? Many states and communities have created their own witness protection programs that try to offer some measure of security—from posting police cars outside witnesses' homes to moving witnesses out of their old neighborhood until the trial is over. But the programs often lack adequate funding. And on top of that, it can be a lot tougher to protect state and local witnesses than it is to deal with mob rats. Street and gang crime witnesses are frequently reluctant to abandon their homes and neighborhoods. They get bored, lonely, and afraid when they're pulled away from their families. And even if they can be persuaded to move a short distance—say a few towns away—the temptation to look in on friends and relatives back in the old neighborhood can be both irresistible and dangerous.

More could be done. Improving funding and stiffening penalties would be a good start. When prosecutors can persuade a witness to cooperate, they should have the money they need to pay for motel bills, replace locks on doors, and pick up the tab for gas and groceries. Because it can be tough to come up with the scratch to do this on short notice, some states, like California, have set aside funds that communities can use to foot the bill. Other states should follow their lead, and the federal government

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should set up an emergency fund to help communities pick up the slack when there's a shortfall. And with regard to penalties, states should rank intimidation right up there with the gravest non-capital offenses. Under Washington, D.C. law, intimidators can get up to life imprisonment. That sounds about right.

4. Police the Prosecutors—As Well As the Police. Police and prosecutors are the gatekeepers of the criminal justice system. But although police brutality gets a lot of attention—as it has recently in New York and Los Angeles—prosecutors tend to escape scrutiny.

We should pay closer attention to the prosecutors. They, after all, are the ones who decide which cases go to trial and how they're presented. If they misrepresent the facts, they can wind up sending innocents to jail. And that's a problem for two reasons. First, there are a lot of powerful incentives that make prosecutors want to win—sometimes even at the expense of the truth. ("Winning has become more important than doing justice," complained Harvard Law School professor Alan Dershowitz in a 1999 *Chicago Tribune* interview. "Nobody runs for Senate saying 'I did justice.'") Second, when a prosecutor does step over the line, he rarely faces serious punishment.

How do we know? In 1999, *The Chicago Tribune* published a nationwide survey. They looked at all the murder cases in the past 40 years that had to be retried because a prosecutor hid evidence or permitted a witness lie. They found 381 in all. What happened to the prosecutors in those cases? Almost nothing. About a dozen were investigated by state agencies, but only one was actually fired—and he was eventually reinstated. And not a single one of the offending prosecutors was ever convicted of either hiding or presenting false evidence. Indeed, not a single prosecutor in the history of the Republic has ever been convicted on those grounds—even though they're both felony offenses. As Pace University law professor Bennett Gershman told the *Tribune*: "There is no check on prosecutorial misconduct except for the prosecutor's own attitudes and beliefs and inner morality."

But isn't the defense bar a check on prosecutorial misconduct? Don't count on it. In December 1999, *The New York Times* noted that the number of legal aid lawyers in New York City's Criminal Court had dropped from 1,000 a decade ago to 500 today. And it quoted Manhattan defense attorney Ronald Kuby as saying that "No competent criminal defense lawyer zealously representing his clients can make a living on [legal aid rates]." This problem is obviously not limited to New York.

All this suggests that if we want to make certain prosecutors are doing the right thing, we have to police them more aggressively. That means creating well-muscled independent agencies that have strong incentives to find out when prosecutors misbehave—and to fine, press charges, and/or fire them when they do. Judges should help them out by publishing the names of prosecutors who commit misconduct in their orders and opinions (not a common practice)—and circulating them to the independent watchdogs. And while we're on the subject, states should also set up similar watchdogs to police the police—both for abuse and sheer incompetence. There should be independent civilian commissions that not only have responsibility for overseeing police departments, but that also have the power to impose discipline on the departments when they stray.

5. Abolish the Insanity Defense. It is true that you have to be a bit crazy to shoot the President like John Hinckley, or to cut off your husband's penis like Lorena Bobbit—but should that affect the state's ability to keep you separated from the rest of society, where you might do further harm? If you are rich or high profile or just plain lucky enough to find a defense lawyer who can successfully argue the insanity defense on your behalf, it can.

Consider the case of Tomar Cooper Locker, who opened fire on a crowded D.C. hospital ward—killing a boxer named Ruben Bell and wounding five bystanders. The apparent motive for the shooting was that Locker had a vendetta against Bell, whom he thought had killed his girlfriend. But Locker pled insanity based on the claim that he was suffering from a momentary attack of post-traumatic stress disorder—a claim endorsed by the same psychiatrist who testified in the Lorena Bobbit incident. The jury bought it. Locker was then committed to St. Elizabeth's hospital, where he was treated for two whole months until, earlier this spring, doctors declared him fit to reenter society.

Michael Lazas is another example of someone who slipped through the system as a result of the insanity defense. In 1993, Lazas was found not guilty by reason of insanity for strangling his infant son and sent to Maryland's Perkins Hospital Center. It was his second violent assault; two years earlier he had

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stabbed a picnic companion in the throat. In 1998, Perkins officials thought Lazas was ready for a group home, so they moved him to an essentially zero-security facility in Burtonsville, Maryland. In February of this year, Lazas simply walked away from the Burtonsville facility. He was reportedly gone for four days before anyone notified the authorities he was missing.

In both cases, the public would have been better served if there were no insanity defense. There is no dispute that Locker and Lazas did what they were accused of doing. As a society, we've made a judgment that people who do these things need to be separated from the rest of us for a certain amount of time. Locker and Lazas should each have been found guilty and served the requisite time for his offenses—in an appropriate treatment facility to the extent necessary. The law should not force chronic schizophrenics to do hard time in maximum-security prisons. But it should be adamant about finding ways to keep those who commit violent crimes at a safe distance from the rest of society.

Lock up the right people

Politicians who vote for mandatory minimum sentences stake a claim to being tough on crime. Politicians who vote against them run the risk of appearing weak. Of course in a perfect world, "toughness" would be assessed by whether you put the right (i.e., most dangerous) people in jail—rather than how many people you put in jail. But the world of sentencing statutes is far from perfect.

The political blindness that surrounds these laws can be partly traced to the death of Len Bias—a Maryland basketball star who had been the Celtics' first pick in the NBA draft. When Bias overdosed on cocaine in his college dorm room in 1986, he become an overnight poster child for the war on drugs. It was an election year and Beltway legislators, who were close enough to Maryland to be caught up in the public horror at Bias' death, wanted to make a statement. So they replaced a set of temporary federal sentencing guidelines that had been in place with permanent "mandatory minimum" sentencing requirements. States followed suit with their own iterations of these requirements. And in 1994, California and Washington added a new wrinkle when they passed so-called "three strikes laws" that require courts to give 25 year minimum sentences to any two-time felony offender who steps out of line a *third* time—even if to commit a misdemeanor offense.

These laws have generated some spectacularly unfair results. For example, a California court recently sentenced Michael Wayne Riggs, a homeless man, to 25 years in jail for stealing a bottle of vitamins. His most serious prior offense was snatching a purse.

But if Riggs' story is maddening at the individual level, the major concern at the policy level is what all this chest-thumping legislation is doing to our nation's prison system. There are roughly 2 million Americans behind bars, of whom more than half are there for non-violent (in most cases drug-related) crimes. The country spends $31 billion per year on corrections—twice what it spent 10 years ago. There is still not enough room in America's prisons.

Even looking past the overcrowding issues,however, sentencing laws have proven to be losers. Sending minor drug offenders to jail exposes them to hardened criminals and increases the risk of them committing more serious felonies when they get out. The Rand Corporation has found that mandatory minimums are the least cost-effective way to reduce drug use and crime—as compared to treatment programs and discretionary sentencing. Even White House Drug Czar Barry McCaffery has acknowledged that "we can't incarcerate our way out of the drug problem." It is therefore unsurprising that a dozen or so states have formed commissions to reconsider their rigid sentencing policies and several, like Michigan, have begun to repeal them. And on the progressive front, Arizona recently became the first state to offer the option of drug treatment, rather than prison to its non-violent offenders convicted on drug charges.

Arizona's program is both cost efficient and makes sense. A California study found that one dollar spent on drug treatment saves seven dollars in reduced hospital admissions and law enforcement costs. These savings can be put to better use elsewhere in the criminal justice system. For example, they can be used to help communities develop facilities to siphon off non-violent offenders from the heart of the system. Roughly two percent of the nation's drug offender traffic is processed in special "drug courts," which dole out a combination of light sentencing—such as short jail terms, community service, and probation—plus mandatory drug treatment. More drug courts would almost certainly be a good thing.

Communities also do themselves a service when they set up tough probation programs that actually help minor offenders steer away from trouble.

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Orange County, California has had substantial success with a program that involves 6 a.m. inspection visits to all participants from program officers, surprise drug testing, counseling, and monthly evaluations by the supervising judge. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in order to work these programs have to be ready to dish out real discipline to participants who fail to live up to their end of the bargain. Orange County participant Dale Wilson, who had been addicted to cocaine for three decades before joining the program, told the *Los Angeles Times* that he was sent to jail for nine days when he had a relapse. "It's a strict program," he said. "But I never would've gotten to the point to keep me sober if I hadn't been faced with these punishments."

Put More Order in the Courts

Finally, we shouldn't forget that the best laws and policies in the world aren't going to do a whole lot of good unless we have reliable, industrious, and smoothly administered courts. And while there are lots of hard-working judges with the same objective, there are also plenty of clunkers.

In a 1996 San Francisco case, for example, two municipal court judges batted a domestic violence case back and forth on an October Friday. According to *The Recorder*, a legal newspaper, Judge Wallace Douglass was supposed to hear the case—but he double-booked another trial for the same day. So he sent it across the hall to Judge Ellen Chaitin, who held a mid-day conference—and then sent it back to Douglass when it failed to settle by the early afternoon. Douglass then said that he couldn't find a jury to hear the case (it was Friday afternoon, after all) and, because a delay would have violated the defendant's speedy trial rights, he dismissed it. This calls to mind the story of the Manhattan judge who in 1971 adjourned a robbery trial to catch a flight to Europe. Another trial would have violated the defendant's constitutional rights, so he walked away scot-free.

The problem is two-fold. One is that judges don't always push themselves that hard. In 1989, *Manhattan Lawyer* correspondents observed that, on average, the judges in Manhattan's criminal court were in session about four and a half hours a day. Sixty-two percent spent less than five hours in session, and 42 percent started after 10 a.m. In Baltimore, which has more than 300 homicides per year, you can sometimes walk through a criminal courthouse around 3:30 or 4:00 p.m. and find courtrooms that have adjourned for the day.

But the additional problem is that judges are too often inclined to schedule things first for their own convenience, second for the convenience of lawyers, and last of all for the convenience of the people the system should be bending over to accommodate—jurors and witnesses. One prosecutor said that there are days in D.C. Superior Court that unfold as follows: The jury is instructed to arrive at 10 a.m. and sits for hours while the judge kibbitzes with the lawyers over technical legal issues. Sometimes the kibbitzing runs right into lunch. Then everybody trundles off for a two hour break. The trial starts in earnest at 3 p.m. And court adjourns between 4:30 and 5 p.m.—sometimes earlier.

Lack of organization is another problem. Washington D.C.'s Superior Court has no central scheduling mechanism. Judges control their own dockets and are allowed to book two or three trials for the same day, anticipating that there will be pleas and continuances. Policemen who are supposed to testify wind up milling around the courthouse for days on end, waiting for their trials to be called, and—if they otherwise happen to be off-duty—collecting overtime.

It has to be possible to run a tighter ship because some judges already do. As noted in last month's "Tilting at Windmills," for example, a Tennessee judge named Duane Slone has adopted a policy that he won't hear plea bargains on the day a trial is scheduled to begin. This saves the jury from having to sit and wait while lawyers haggle over a plea and allows trials to start promptly at 9 a.m. Common sense courtesies like this could kill a lot of the inefficiencies that you see in courtrooms today. But more importantly, disciplinary panels need to keep better tabs on the courts and punish (by fines or demotions if necessary) those judges who fail to show up on time, stay all day, and run an orderly docket.

What Next?

Wholesale reform of the criminal justice system obviously isn't going to happen overnight. Some reforms can only be made by Supreme Court decision. Others will have to be effected through new laws and practices at the federal, state, and local levels. Still, it's a set of tasks well worth facing. It's great that crime is down but if we it to stay there, and if we want to make sure that we're sending the right people to jail, then we need a system that we can really trust beyond a reasonable doubt. ●

Research assistance provided by Elisabeth Frater and Patrick Esposito

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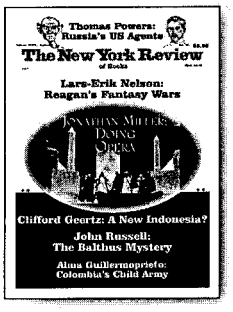

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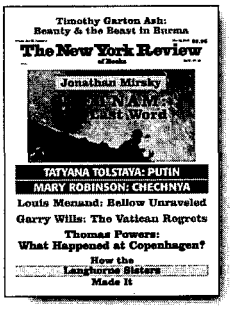

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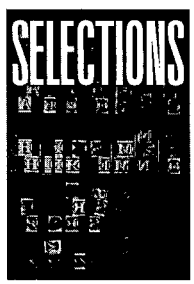

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The Lost Village

How the suits took over the last small town in America: Washington, D.C.

BY TOM WOLL

WASHINGTON IS THE CITY THAT people scrape and claw to get to, and then make a career of disparaging. In no other city that I know of, do people—important people at least—feel so superior to the place that they themselves comprise. Members of Congress conduct a nonstop beg-a-thon for campaign funds so that they can stay in this awful place that they revile. Southern drawls deepen, and regional costuming becomes more pronounced the longer they are here.

Beltway pundits meanwhile sneer about the Beltway pundits, as if they weren't just such pundits themselves. The major players here accuse one another of being that which they themselves are; and this Dostoevskyian undertone reached its peak, or nadir, in the Clinton impeachment farce, when one after another of the President's accusers turned out to be accusing him of things that they themselves had done—or were doing still. Dan Burton, the Republican of Indiana who called Clinton a "sleaze," had been the Lothario of the Indiana state legislature with a secret illegitimate offspring. Newt Gingrich, of course, was doing it with a young lady in the church choir.

They all feel a need to attack some part of what they are—to separate themselves from the city that they crave to be a part of. At one level they say to the public, "See, I'm not like the others in this degenerate place." At another level, perhaps, they chastise themselves for the knowledge that they *are*.

But before the rest of us get too huffy, we might pause and consider whether we all aren't implicated to some degree. The Washington that Americans love to disparage bears more than a little resemblance to the America that they inhabit. There's a certain pandering quality to the Beltway bashing, after all. The politician does not just say, "I'm not like the shmucks." He or she also says, "You voters aren't like them either." Yes, Washington has peculiarities and tics aplenty. Yet in the end, it's the way it is because America is the way it is. It is a distillate of a trait that DeToqueville noted long ago—the narrow self-seeking, and the commercial culture that amplifies and reinforces this quality at every turn.

You've read that Washington today is dominated by money, obsessed with media and image, driven by manipulative and intrusive advertising, in the thrall of self-interest and the short-term view. Gee, does that sound a little like a country that I know—like a "New Economy" that I know? In fact, the best aspects of Washington—the ones that are disappearing—were a form of resistance to the dominant trends in the U.S. today, rather than an acquiescence to them. In some respects, the more Washington comes to resemble the rest of America, the worse it gets.

Suit City

My friends says it started with the suits.

He was back in D.C. after four years in San Francisco, where he had worn dungarees every day, and could have been taken for an IPO millionaire. Now he was on an errand to the Hart Senate Office Building, the new one with the big mobile in the atrium. He was wearing khaki pants and a blazer, which for him is dressed up. But here on Capitol Hill he felt like a schlepp. Everyone was wearing suits—not just suits, but power suits, the kind the majority of men in the Bay Area probably don't even own. He expected a Capitol police officer to nab him for insufficient attire.

I've noticed this too. There have been suits on Capitol Hill—in both senses of the word—ever since there has been a Capitol Hill. What's different now, I think, is how pervasive they have become. Not that

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long ago, clothing served to reinforce the Congressional caste system. Dark suits for senators, lighter ones for chiefs of staff, jackets and flannel slacks for legislative assistants, the khaki and blue blazer uniform for interns. Now, it seems that dress up has moved down the scale. You see interns wearing suits and white shirts as they sort the mail. (Whether by acculturation or good sense, female interns still sometimes show up in dungarees.) It's as though everyone is going to interviews, which in a sense they are.

This is typically the cue for a pundit rant. Washington is dressing up at a time when the real producers in the economy, the hearty yeomen with the IPO rakings and nonexistent profits, are dressing down. How out of touch. How *Beltway*. It is true that the Washington power corridor can feel like a college campus on which everyone is trying to impress one another. Yet the power centers in most major cities are besuited too. And anyway, the question is not *what* they are wearing in Washington, but *why*.

Follow Bill Gates or other high tech billionaires through the halls of Congress these days and you get a clue. Those voices you hear are the sounds of powerful people fawning. Redmond and Mountain View may be a continent from Washington, but they revolve upon the same axis: the money culture that affects us all.

Politics follows commerce at virtually every turn. TV ads, demographic targeting, focus groups, and polls—most of the scummy apparatus of modern politics started in the business world. As commerce has engulfed the culture—as just about every state and stage of human experience has turned into something to buy—it should not be surprising that it has engulfed politics too. As commerce panders to an ever-lower denominator of self-absorption and desire, it should not be surprising that politics does too. Washington is where we permit ourselves to see these things most clearly, because we say that it is not ourselves. Who dresses down, if not people who want to show that they are not the kind of people who dress up?

Besides, whom do you think the suits are representing, anyway?

The End of Time

Not long ago I had occasion to peruse the record of Congressional hearings from the early 1930s. The committee chairman was Senator Robert LaFollette Jr., the Republican of Wisconsin, and the subject was the senator's proposal for a National Economic Commission to map a path out of the Depression. LaFollette sought comment from leading economic experts, captains of industry, labor leaders, and the like. The thing that is impressive today—staggering is a better word—is the depth of the discussion, and how thoroughly the senator knew the subject at hand.

With virtually no staff, LaFollette led the representative of the Federal Reserve through testimony that alone occupies more than forty small-print pages in the hearing record. It was a virtuoso performance, and he repeats it over and over. The entire Senate staff fit into one building back then (now there are three, plus the Capitol itself). The hot new information technology in town was the telephone.

If congressional speeches often seem like the calcified shells of old ideas, it's partly because these people have so little time to reflect on new ones.

Yet it is hard to envision hearings like that today—probing basic economic questions, with little regard to ideological boundaries or the clock. Partly that's because of the ideological repression of these more prosperous times. But partly too it is the paradox of the information age. Amidst a deluge of fact we seem less able to ask good questions. With a proliferation of "knowledge workers" in the form of staff, no one seems to know enough.

Or have enough time. In theory, more staff should mean more time in Congress—just as more labor saving devices should give us more time in our homes. Yet members of Congress, like the rest of us, have practically none, and the reason comes back to money. Time and money in Washington are like time and space in physics: different dimensions of the same thing. If you want to know why no one has any time in Congress, the first place to look is at the money that flows in.

The money question is more nuanced, and therefore interesting, than the media generally portray. Campaign money buys different things in different contexts. Speaking generally, corporate money still buys less from Democrats than from Republicans—

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though the gap has been closing. From Republicans it buys marriage, from Democrats perhaps an off-and-on affair. Sometimes it buys little more than time on a crowded schedule; almost always there's a built-in caveat that compelling home state interests come first.

But the basic thing that money buys is time. A campaign contribution may not always swing a vote. But it always occupies time—time in which something else isn't getting done. It starts of course with the fund raising itself. Dick Gephardt, the House minority leader, spends two hours a day on the telephone asking for cash, and you can be sure that his Republican counterparts are spending at least as much. Practically all of them do, to some degree at least. They also spend a lot of time at receptions and access-fests for donors, strategizing with consultants, and the rest. The time a LaFollette might have spent reading, today's representative must spend raising money. If the congressional speeches on C-SPAN often seem like the calcified shells of old ideas, wrapped in hectoring polemic, it's partly because these people have so little time in which to reflect on new ones.

Thus the beating up on government—it's about the only institution left in town that doesn't give money to campaigns.

Then there is the time spent meeting with the people who gave the money. This is more important than it might appear. Time I spend with you is time I don't spend with someone else, including the people on the other side of you. It is time I don't spend trying to check the truth of what you've said. I once was involved in an obscure trade issue that involved many of the largest corporations in the U.S. and abroad. It was the kind of vote that liberal Democrats would use to make amends to business lobbies because they usually faced no organized opposition from the other side.

This time they did however—from a tiny group whose marginality was evident in that I was among the Washington advocates. The congressional waters did not exactly part at my approach. It would take weeks to get a meeting with a lowly staffer. On one such occasion, I was sitting in the reception area waiting for my audience, when a group of men, with power suits and briefcases, emerged from the senator's office. There was a jocular familiarity about the scene. These were lobbyists for the group I was opposing.

Such experiences send a message, one that is reinforced on Capitol Hill continually. It's the kind of Washington tableau that reporters forget how to see.

I once heard a veteran (too veteran, perhaps) Washington reporter dismiss the role of money in politics on the grounds that PACs don't always get what they want. This is true. PACs often create stalemate; the prolixity of competing interests causes the process to grind to a halt. For years, commercial banks, S&Ls, insurance companies, and brokers fought to a standstill on banking reform. (The eventual resolution showed that stalemate isn't always the worst thing.) They all give a lot of money, but they don't all get what they want.

Yet neither do they have to swallow much they can't abide. The key questions are whose agendas are on the table to begin with and who gets the congressional time. If you look at your bank charges today—the ATM fees, the fees for using a teller or even receiving a bad check—you just might get the impression that the main concerns of the congressional majority on banking legislation were not yours. You would be right.

The official term for the clogged congressional arteries is "gridlock." Typically it is cited as a Washington disease. Yet Washington is not the only place in this country where time has shrunk, and where competing demands strain the system both individually and collectively. Members of Congress, like the rest of us, are subject to the nonstop barrage of the "information" economy. They, like us, have lost the quiet of the home at night thanks to TV, the telephone, and the Web; and have lost the wonderful enforced leisure of travel too. Sen. LaFollette rode the train between Washington and Wisconsin. There were no cell phones or remote e-mail. There was nothing to do but read, talk, or think. (In Washington, the air conditioner has destroyed the enforced leisure of summer as well.)

Washington isn't the only place in America where money drives the agenda, nor where the gathering and spending of it consumes people's time. In Silicon Valley, time has just about disappeared. In this seed bed of the nation's supposed wealth, no one has any of that which wealth is supposed to signify—free time. Regis McKenna, a consultant-guru in the Valley, has hailed this development as the bright future of us all: "Imag-

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ine a world," he wrote in his book *Real Time*, "in which time seems to vanish and space seems completely malleable. Where the gap between need or desire and fulfillment collapses to zero. Where distance equals a microsecond in lapsed connection time. A virtual world created at your command."

This may sound scary. Regis thinks it's way cool. Two hundred and seventy million of us in the U.S. alone, seeking instantaneous fulfillment—that is not a promising recipe for democracy, which requires process and compromise. It could easily jam the circuits, which it has, in the form of noise, traffic, pollution, and sprawl. It could speed up the day to the point where there is no time at all. Our experience of time arises from a sense of space between events. McKenna lays out a hypothetical daily schedule for the person of tomorrow, in which space has ceased to exist. At fifteen and thirty minute intervals, it lists such events as "awakened by CD music, e-mail monitor, security appliance controller," "go to office online," "keep appointment with 'Weight Watchers'," and "get lunch at Burger King drive through." The day ends with: "Take two melatonin to get to sleep fast."

McKenna calls this person, without irony, the "Twenty-Four Hour Consumer." The schedule helps explain why stress is unlikely to diminish any time soon. And anyone who has worked on Capitol Hill will recognize something about this schedule. The tasks are different, but the manic tempo, the sense of entrapment in a movie that's running too fast, is much the same as what our representatives endure. The people who are creating the future have created it for Washington as well. Washington lags behind the culture at large, but this does not speak in the capital's disfavor.

Spaced Out

Washington is composed of at least three cities. There is the official Washington of government and lobbyists; the black Washington that covers most of the city's expanse; and the far Northwest quadrant in which reside most of the white and influential. For years, Dupont Circle has been a buffer zone between the first and the third—between the government enclave that people come to work in, and the neighborhoods in which people actually live.

South of the Circle, along Connecticut Avenue, are the graceless modern boxes of lobby and trade association land, where rents run in the vicinity of $48 a square foot and where the uniform is suit and tie even on sweltering summer days. North of the Circle people wear t-shirts and there are still, miraculously, low-rent buildings where operations like this magazine survive with fingers crossed. Sam Smith, the local essayist, calls the Circle the "border checkpoint through which you pass to go from community to facility."

Through the '70s and '80s, the forces of improvement marched up the avenue, routing the eccentric and impecunious in their path. This magazine occupied a suite near the Mayflower Hotel in the '70s, with seven individual offices for $500 a month. That building has given way to a high-end office emporium. The Dupont Circle Building, once owned by the Machinists Union and a rabbit warren of quixotic causes, has gone the same sad way. But the movement to eradicate low-rent contrariness from the nation's capitol—a movement which Smith calls "demographic cleansing"—somehow stopped at the Circle, more or less.

In recent months the line has fallen. A company by the name of Starwood Realty has purchased a row of buildings north of the Circle, and has evicted the freelance writers and the community-minded architecture firm. The Newsroom, the District's best out-of-town newspaper store, had to move, as did a second-hand-book store. The new tenants, whoever they are, most likely will represent "improvement" only in the narrow sense in which developers and economists use that term.

I mention this because that bursting of the geographic dam is suggestive of something larger that has happened in Washington—and in the culture generally—over the last generation or so. It is a form of enclosure, the colonizing of human space on behalf of moneyed interest. Much as the Enclosure Acts of 18th century England redefined the commons as real estate and forced small farmers from their land, so the hyper-commoditized real estate of Washington has re-rendered the city in the image of those who pay the higher rents. Square foot by square foot, it has forced out those who speak from different values and seek different ends.

To put this another way, money defines not just time in Washington. It defines space as well; and this steers people in the direction in which money flows. In the '60s and '70s, it was possible to get by on very little. There were cheap apartments in Adams Morgan, group houses in Dupont Circle and Glover Park, and furnished rooms in the old West End. A book of 10 tickets at the Circle Theater, on Pennsylvania Avenue, cost 20 dollars. A plate of spanakopeta at the Astor restaurant at 18th and M was $1.95—with salad and roll.

Power to the Shoppers

The good old days weren't always so good. But they were less expensive, which meant more space,

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psychological as well as physical, and thus a greater sense of possibility. The future begins in low-rent zones; they are the kitchens of the next thing. The original Apple computers came from a garage; Microsoft manages its monopoly from a sprawling office campus. In Washington, where the business is policy and (occasionally) ideas, cheap office space is the equivalent of Steve Jobs' family garage. When it disappears, so does thinking that challenges the dominion of the moneyed.

What's left are amply-funded opinion-tanks that provide intellectual justification for the providers of those funds. (The term "think" tank implies a mental destination that is not predetermined, which is not the case. Name any such institution in town—Heritage, for example, or CATO—and an issue, and most people in political Washington could tell you exactly where the place stands.) We get old ideas packaged as new ones, the old political economy pretending to be new. We get the enclosure of political and intellectual space, and it all starts with rent.

Rents here aren't yet as bad as in San Francisco or New York. But they are starting up the same steep ramp, and this turns the inner compass needle toward the paycheck, even in people who'd rather think of something else. It produces a constant state of worry that some slicked-back sharpie in a t-shirt and Armani shades could drive up and put you on the street.

Housing is just the start. The cheap repertory movie theaters like the Circle and the Biograph are gone—the former thanks to George Washington University's real estate empire, the latter to a CVS drug store. Budget restaurants like the Astor are gone too. North of the Circle, there's just one cheap pizza parlor left. If you live in Boston, New York, San Francisco, Seattle, then you know the scene. In a thousand different ways, the city now says to newcomers: If you can't pay, you don't play. This is on top of the heavy load of financial obligation that young people now bring with them. One of the most clever and insidious acts of the Reagan Administration was to cut student aid and replace it with loans. The Reaganites knew that young people carrying major debt would be less likely to become low-paid trouble-makers.

Such changes have taken place largely beneath the radar of the established media, in large part because media salaries have increased with the rents. (George Will does not worry about Mr. Hippo-Sleazo driving up with an eviction notice.) But they have altered the context of politics here in a fundamental way. Since time and space are different dimensions of the same thing, it's not surprising that the same forces that have taken over time in Washington, have claimed its space as well—legislative as well as geographic.

Nader's Vaders

When the first wave of activists came to D.C. in the '60s they found a sleepy capital of gray men of the kind pictured in the *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines of the day. The power axis was defined largely by the Chamber of Commerce, the AFL-CIO, the Congress, and the president. The deals were done in quiet; media was a secondary consideration. Trade associations were in New York; the lobbyists were in D.C.

A Ralph Nader could feel a little like a kid who finds an empty playground basketball court with a new rim and net. There was political space to claim, and the media, still chafing from the repression of the McCarthy years, was eager to take on the status quo. Operating out of phone booths and from a tiny office in the old National Press Building, a Nader could vault over the back-room deals and speak directly to the public. For a number of years, in opinion polls, he ranked up with the president and the chief justice of the Supreme Court as the most influential people in America.

But Nader et al. spawned their own antithesis. The story has been told many times: how the trade associations swarmed into Washington, corporations expanded their lobby ranks, the opinion tanks cast their spell on the reportorial class, and so-called astro-turf campaigns stirred up a facsimile of grass-roots support to undercut the advocates who could not afford such tactics. The result is evident today. Washington's legislative space has become as crowded as its office space—with equally high rent. The campaign-finance system is the DOS of this machine—and I'm talking in part about the supposed reforms of the 1970s, which in some ways made the problem worse.

Before those reforms put a limit on individual contributions, a member of Congress could load up on money from a handful of interests, and thus be free to take on the rest. They might even have a benevolent angel who wanted them in office to do the right thing. This effect was evident especially in rural states, where corporate interests were not strong, campaigns were relatively cheap, and the major interest groups—family farmers for example—were benign. The so-called Common Cause reforms changed all that. With a tight cap on individual donations, members had to spread their nets more broadly. They had to subject themselves to many smaller strings as opposed to fewer big ones; and this turned Congress into a dense thicket of

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interest in which there is little space to move. Thus the beating up on government—it's about the only institution left in town that doesn't give money to campaigns.

The enclosure of political space also has upped the ante on contentiousness and rancor. Congress has never been a place where the lions lie down gently with the lambs. But the kind of gang-war mentality that prevails today is over the top. Newt Gingrich had a lot to do with this; as a minority-party bomb thrower he turned the place into a Beirut—and easier in than out. But money has a lot to do with this too (and is not unrelated to Gingrich of course). Things get tense when there is big money on the table. When that money is stirring up trouble for you in your district, they get more tense still.

Awful Washington again. Yet, in this too, Congress is a mirror of the country at large. The enclosure of political space in Washington is not unlike the commoditizing of social space generally. Trying to get through a day in the U.S. without being assaulted by ads is about as hard as trying to move legislation in Washington without running into the thicket of PACs. The efforts to patent and bio-engineer life for monetary gain are the commercial equivalent of the effort to re-engineer the political process for commercial ends. This applies to the media as well. The disinclination of Congress to upset big donors is much like the reluctance of the big-shot media to upset big advertisers or their corporate bosses. When journalists at the major outlets say Congress is a captive of moneyed interests, they too are pointing the finger at another version of themselves.

Work in the nation's capital has come closer to the market ideal, just like everything else.

All Over America

The enclosure of political space in Washington has been much like the invasion of Wal-Mart into small town America. It has undermined the political Main Street—the traditional relationships of the political village—and left the impersonal calculus of the market in its place. As Washington has embraced the mantras of the market, it has shown by its own example the shortcomings of the market as a social model.

Congress itself has participated in these changes, largely through a vast increase in staff. Not that long ago, House and Senate offices had a small and intimate feel, like a family business. There was little bureaucracy or specialization, few buffers between the staff and the boss. The informality could take you by surprise. As a young public interest intern, I once helped a Senate subcommittee prepare for hearings involving the predations of the Penn Central Railroad. The day before the hearings, late in the afternoon, the staff attorney realized that no one had drafted an opening statement for the chairman. He was busy, and there was no one else to do it. So the task fell to me.

I sat down at a Selectric, a bit dazed to be assigned such an important task, and proceeded to write a statement I was sure would bring the assemblage to its feet. I was also sure that someone would revise it before morning, so I really cut loose. The next morning I took a seat in the hearing room, full of anticipation. Some of my own words might be uttered, in the Senate of the United States. The chairman started reading, and I was thrilled, and then horrified, as my sophomoric prose came back at me from the dais, word for hyperventilating word. This was a useful lesson on the hazards of cheesy polemic. But more importantly, it showed how Congress was not a model of professional management in those less bureaucratic days.

But professional management is a corporate ideal, not a democratic one. What the Senate lacked in management, it made up for in tradition, and ties of loyalty and trust. People called it a "club," which they generally did not mean as a compliment, and with good reason. Yet a club has a good side too—just as a traditional ethnic neighborhood has a good side too, Archie Bunker bigotry and all. This was most apparent at the staff level, where employees felt like personal assistants, like clerks for a judge.

As staffs expanded in the '70s and '80s, that world came apart. There were good reasons for the expansion, or what seemed like good reasons at the time. Congress wanted to keep closer tabs on the bureaucracy it had created; and, after Watergate, on the imperial presidency as well. There was a need to deal with the new legions of lobbyists, and with the constituent mail that was pouring in as never before. There was also the worthy cause of decentralization. The so-called Watergate Class of 1974 insisted on tempering the power of

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chairmen by giving subcommittees more autonomy and staff.

Justified and beneficial to some extent, the staff increases nevertheless came at a price. More staff meant more points of contact for lobbyists and more memos for the member to read at night. It meant more data and technocracy and less time for big questions. Daily schedules came to resemble the departure screens at LaGuardia. There was also a large shift in the relationships between members and staff. Where once offices were a little like family grocery stores, with all the makeshift informality, they began to feel more like corporate operations, with rigid hierarchies and strict separation of functions. In this setting, employment became more fungible—more a labor market. After elections, resumés start appearing in congressional offices from the staffs of the defeated or retired—a migrant laborforce with issue expertise and knowledge of the Hill to sell. Liberal Democrats find resumés from former Republican staff. They know the issues and the players. What difference does it make where the boss stands?

Meat Market

Washington has always been a magnet for people on the make. Back in the Gilded Age, one enterprising congressional staff member also worked as a newspaper correspondent and lobbyist at the same time. Today the hustle is more buttoned-down, and hedged by ethics rules that provide an aura of legitimacy to what might otherwise be unseemly. Build the resumé in Congress for a few years, or at the Securities and Exchange Commission, or at the tax division of the Justice Department, and you are ready to sell your human capital at the law firms and lobby operations across town.

The migration down Pennsylvania Avenue to K Street seems to be increasing. According to the Congressional Management Foundation, which studies the operations of Congress, the typical staff tenure has been diminishing. People get their visas stamped more quickly; and the more stamps the better the caché. The day I write this, the "In the Loop" column in *The Washington Post*, includes this item:

"Going private ... Bill O'Neill, legislative director to former representative Robert A. Roe (D-N.J.) and more recently senior policy advisor to the House Government Reform Committee under Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.), is off to Sprint's Washington office to be a director of government affairs."

I don't know Mr. O'Neill. His work for a mainstream Democrat and then a right-wing Republican might have reflected deeply-held ideals. But there is little question that such work on both sides of the partisan aisle positions one nicely for a corporate job in "government affairs." There was a time when the culture of the institution could provide a bit of counterweight to such moves. Someone who had worked closely with the late Congressman Wright Patman, a legendary populist on banking issues and chairman of the House Banking Committee, might feel uncomfortable about trying to lobby the congressman on behalf of Chase Manhattan Bank.

But the increased liquidity of human capital in the capital—the absence of what economists call transactional "friction" and others call principle, or loyalty, or moral scruple—has diminished this effect. Thus the increased scale of Congress has meshed neatly with the commoditizing of space and time in Washington. Market economics is the study of transactions between strangers for money. The implicit thrust is to drive more of life into an arena in which people deal with one another in this way. Thus, work in the nation's capital has come closer to the market ideal, just like everything else. Life becomes a continuing audition—thus the suits, which serve as a kind of modem connection, an announcement that yes, I'm the kind of person you would want to have.

That's not entirely fair, of course. There are dedicated servants of the public interest who wear suits every day, just as there are members of Congress who have striven mightily to resist these trends. I have worked with both, and that is one reason I am a little fed up with people who obsess over the mote in Washington's eye but don't consider the beam in their own. Before the grumbling starts again over the wicked ways of Washington, pause just one second please. An overheated housing market, a rapacious grasp for money, a manic drive to commoditize—and make money from—every moment of conscious experience, an itinerant work force that is forever on the prowl—this does sound a little like a New Economy that I know.

The old Washington was pre-modern, in ways both good and bad. It was defined by folkways, tradition and personal loyalties, as well as by the transaction of money. It had space for the contrary and eccentric. It had time in which people could think about these things. As technology and commerce have uprooted the last vestiges of the pre-modern from our lives, it is little wonder that politics have followed suit. Sometimes what we see is what we are. If Washington seems out of touch, then we all might look around and ask whether this might be connected just a bit to what our country has become. ●

Research assistance provided by Ramona Buehler and Patrick Esposito.

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Substance Abuse

Faking, flubbing, and cramming with the media's talking heads

BY ALEXANDRA ROBBINS

IT'S A DRILL THAT VETERANS OF THE Washington press corps know all too well. The booker from a highly-regarded talk show calls you four hours before air time. They're doing a story on the turmoil in Zimbabwe. Could you help them out? You're not 100 percent sure where Zimbabwe is but, what the hell, it's a chance to be on TV. You tell her you'll do it, grab the *Times*, reach for the Atlas, and start to cram.

And what if you don't get it all sorted out before your views are broadcast into 20 million homes? You won't be the first. "I don't want to embarrass anybody, but sometimes people come in here and they're not quite ready," talk-show host Diane Rehm says carefully. Walk into the "communication room" minutes before Rehm goes on the air with her Friday "News Round Up" and you will see some of Washington's top journalists poring over the day's papers, speaking urgently into their cell phones, and doing whatever else they can to get the latest word on Rehm's discussion topics. But sometimes Rehm introduces late breaking topics, and sometimes her guests just can't get up to speed in time. In those cases, Rehm says that "Reporters will wing it with the *Times* or the *Post* or the *Wall Street Journal* sitting in front of them." When one of Rehm's guests recently blanked on a question, a co-panelist gave an assist by handing over a newspaper article on the subject.

If we've gotten to the stage where talk show guests are pretty much reading the newspaper into the mic, it seems fair enough to ask—what's the point of these programs? Amazingly enough, a big part of the answer is "public service." The talk show formula has been developed in part to satisfy the Federal Communications Commission's requirement that all TV- and radio-broadcast networks air a certain quota of programming that offers "significant treatment of community issues." But the pace, format, and substance of these shows don't allow for a significant treatment of anything. That's fine with the networks; they're happy enough to have a cheap and easy vehicle for parading celebrity journalists. And judging by the level of participation, it's fine with the journalists as well, who are happy to have a vehicle for enhancing their fame and padding their bank accounts. As *Washington Post* media watchdog Howard Kurtz points out in his book *Hot Air*, journalists who join the punditocracy generally see their lecture fees spike up by thousands of dollars. Moreover, some of the shows pay their guests and many reporters even receive bonuses from their publicity-happy employers for each time they make a talk show appearance—regardless of whether they say anything worth hearing.

Prepping

Of course, given a choice, most journalists would rather be able to get through a show without having to resort to the sort of on-air tactics that Rehm has observed. So after they've been called by enough bookers, talk show regulars tend to develop preparation strategies that can be applied to a wide range of topics, and that can be successfully employed in less than twenty-four hours—which is the maximum amount of notice that most shows give of their discussion topics.

There are a couple of sources that talk show regulars cite as absolutely indispensable. When the *Weekly Standard*'s Tucker Carlson gets called for a TV appearance, he jokes that he briefly consults his own "vast realm of knowledge" and then, like everybody else, he reads the *Hotline*. The *National Journal*'s *Hotline*, a conglomeration of capital commentary, is daily required reading for journalists who want to stay on top of the latest government gossip or collect clever catch phrases they can pass off as relatively new. But what passes for new to the outside-the-Beltway public can tend to sound somewhat warmed over to the home crowd. "The echo is deafening," Carlson says. *Hotline*'s widely-used digest feature, which groups together pithy journalistic remarks on hot topics, rein-

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forces the echo effect. Carlson says, "People look at the digest of cable comments to come up with comments to say on cable. It's like plagiarizing yourself."

Although newspaper and magazine clippings supply pundits with most of their cramming material, those who want their views to sound particularly fresh, original, or well-informed, may go one step further and seek counsel from experts in government, academics, and the press. While this sounds refreshingly like old-fashioned journalism, it isn't necessarily. Big name pundits may come to rely so extensively on one or two experts that the latter can build a second career on the relationship.

So after looking over the *Hotline*, and studying clips from the major papers and newsweeklies, and consulting one's guru, what's next? This is where things can get a bit idiosyncratic. David Brooks, whose recent book on "bourgeois bohemians" was reviewed in this magazine last month, says that he prepares for his appearances by examining the half-dozen potential conversation subjects and writing his thoughts down to organize them. Then, he transcribes his organized thoughts onto blue sheets of paper, which he brings with him on to the set. "It has to be blue because at the "News Hour" they use blue paper," he explains. "If the major leagues are going to do blue paper, then I'm going to do blue paper." (In fact, the "News Hour" has a practical reason for using blue paper: It cuts down glare.)

For some topics, however, neither the *Hotline* nor gurus nor blue-paper crib sheets are necessary. *Time* columnist Margaret Carlson (no relation to the *Standard*'s Tucker), a panelist on "The Capital Gang," waxes nostalgic about the year the impeachment scandal dominated the airwaves. "Any fool could talk about Ken Starr, sex, Monica and Linda Tripp," she says. "It was like having a substitute teacher for an entire year."

Faking

Even if he prepares with great diligence, a talk show guest always takes the risk that he will be asked a question about which he knows nothing. And if there aren't any useful newspapers lying around the set, he may be left with two unattractive choices: Faking it or admitting ignorance. "The people who have zero information and fake it are doing themselves and the public a disservice," says former "Late Edition" host Frank Sesno. But journalists tend to dislike the appearance of ignorance and may be concerned that it will keep them from being asked back. So faking is always an option.

For example, *New York Times* writer Adam Nagourney once appeared on a talk show while he was covering local politics for the *New York Daily News*. In the midst of a political discussion, the host turned to ask a horrified Nagourney, "What do you think about the resignation of Gorbachev?" When Nagourney attempted the first catch-all answer that came to mind— "In the long run, it will be a footnote in history"—the other guest pounced. The experience was so distasteful that Nagourney has since sworn off even watching talk shows. He explains: "I would sit there and think, 'I know these people socially, and I know they are really good at what they do, but I'm not interested in hearing them talk about something they know nothing about.' That goes for me too. Why in the world would anyone care what I thought about turmoil in the Soviet Union?"

Certain issues are more difficult than others. The unofficial pundit consensus is that the most formidable discussion topics are technical ones like health care (says Brooks: "If I don't pay any attention to health care, then I'll have enough brain space for 20 other topics") and, as Nagourney can testify, foreign affairs. It's just plain hard to riff authoritatively on the situation on the ground halfway around the world when your normal beat rarely takes you out of the lower 48. "Kosovo presented quite a dilemma," says Tucker Carlson. "It's easy when you can say 'I just came back from New Hampshire with Gore.' You can't say, 'I was just manning a tank in Kosovo.'"

Lack of firsthand reporting experience also makes screw ups more likely when discussion topics revolve around non-English terms. *Newsweek*'s Howard Fineman was once a guest on Rehm's show when he discovered that he had a mortifying inability to "keep the Hutus and Tutsis straight." Fortunately, one of his co-panelists was Martin Walker, the Washington bureau chief of *The Guardian* (an English newspaper), who valiantly leapt in and carried the discussion. Walker was something of an expert in the region, having done firsthand reporting in Rwanda, but Fineman recalls that "it was still like being in the back of the class at law school where you keep your head down and hope you're not called on."

Echoing these observations, Margaret Carlson suggests that pundits would do well to imitate a Christmas tradition reportedly practiced by writer Calvin Trillin and his wife, Alice. Each year the Trillins give each other a word wrapped in a box: When one year Mr. Trillin gave his wife the word "Iran," that meant for the entire year, he had to handle all dinner-party discussions about Iran. "By the same token," Carlson laughs, "I would love to do 'Capital Gang' where I'm given the Balkans as a gift, so I could let the Balkans go for that year."

But until that practice becomes commonplace,

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most experienced journalists find it helpful to have a standardized approach to stump-the-band questions. Tucker Carlson summarizes his in one word: "Themes." If a question goes to a specific point that leaves him grasping, Carlson moves to a higher level of generality. Adam Nagourney suggests either deflection (say: "Honestly, I'm not the best person to ask about that.") or what he calls "the politician's way" (say: "That's a really interesting question."—then you answer a different one). Former host Sesno prefers to be more straightforward. "If I don't know the answer, I'll say 'I don't know,'" he says. "I would rather look stupid than be wrong."

A confession of ignorance may also prevent certain hosts from attacking. Sesno says hosts can tell when reporters are winging it because "they go into boilerplate mode with talking points." In response, Sesno says, "I bear down. It's the spirit of the hunt." When guests insist on stonewalling him, Sesno rephrases his question and asks it another few times. (Tucker Carlson, take note.)

Flubbing

While most good talk show guests can wing it without too much embarrassment most of the time, there are situations when no amount of faking can help. During one taping of "The Capital Gang," Margaret Carlson recalls being flummoxed when Bob Novak shouted at her: "What's the due bill on that? What's the due bill on that?" during a conversation about Al Gore. Novak wanted to know what kind of leverage environmentalists might have over Gore on a particular issue, but Carlson didn't follow. She paused while she tried to figure out which policy the 'dew bill' addressed. "I'm told it is the only time I ever looked like Dan Quayle. I didn't know where to go or what was going on," Carlson says. She was saved by commercials. "Time ran out," she says. "I was so relieved."

Other personalities aren't so lucky. Tucker Carlson cringes at "a meltdown" he had on a defunct chat show. Carlson's preparation for the program's conversation about Newt Gingrich consisted of consuming a beer and a gargantuan cheeseburger. When the host asked him what he thought about Newt Gingrich being Man of the Year, all the brain-numbed reporter could say was "That's a very good question" over and over again. The host mockingly responded, "Tell us what you really think." The gaffe would have been much less conspicuous had the question not been the kind of softball that guests generally covet because they can then spin the conversation in any given direction. "It was like in ninth grade when you have a zit and you think the whole world is watching, and then you think, no, everyone isn't watching you, but then you realize that your first instinct was right," Carlson says. "They sent me a tape to rub it in. My brother invited people over just to have drinks and replay it."

Even worse than saying nothing is making a glaring error. In those cases, purists like Nina Totenberg say that the only acceptable way for a pundit to recover is to own up in the clearest possible terms. Totenberg once claimed on the air that a certain Senator had been convicted of a crime when he had merely been indicted. She apologized on the next show. "We're flying by the seat of our pants," she says. "I don't know what I meant to say but it came out of my mouth. You can say things without meaning to."

Worst of all, the occasional guest is actually held accountable for a prediction he made in a previous appearance. In the first term of the Clinton administration, frequent guest Andrew Ferguson made the mistake of predicting for the cameras that the President's tax increase would break the back of the economy. Several years later, when Ferguson appeared on the same show spouting a positive view of the economy, the host reminded him of the forecast. "Sirens screamed," Ferguson later wrote in *The Weekly Standard*. "My host was violating the fundamental rule of TV punditry. The guest gives pithy answers of rock-solid certitude. The host agrees never again to mention what those answers are."

But, a good host also recognizes that viewers need a little bit of cringe-producing drama to keep them interested, and will do what it takes to create it. Jon Stewart, who runs his own light-hearted news show on Comedy Central, compares the shows to auto racing:

"These shows are like NASCAR races. They go around the track, they go around the track. It's kind of boring, but every now and again one of them flies off the track into the stands. Everybody likes watching that. You're just waiting for them to go red in the face and pop out of their chair and go, 'You don't know what you're talking about!'"

Stewart cites as proof the evolution of the names for pundit programming. "It used to be "Meet the Press." Now look at the names of the shows—"Hardball," "Crossfire." They might as well call it Deathmatch 2000."

The Pundit's Creed

If Deathmatch 2000 does not quite sound like the name for a public service program, then it's no coincidence. These shows are not about much beyond celebrity, egos, and the friction that these

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two ingredients can create. The possibility of a bunch of know-it-alls duking it out for the last word gets us to tune in. The prospect of the last word being entirely ridiculous keeps us watching. And given the way the shows are structured and journalists prepare, that's always a realistic prospect. Consider Totenberg's early introduction to punditry: "When I first started doing the show, I used to worry about not knowing a lot, so I'd cram. I'd read the spots off the newspapers. I remember sitting there before a show on the Middle East saying I wasn't going to talk too much because I didn't know much about it." But fellow panelist Charles Krauthammer cut her off by neatly summarizing the pundit's creed.

"Well," he said. "That doesn't stop the rest of us." ●

The Washington Monthly Journalism Award

APRIL 2000

JAMES KITFIELD AND SYDNEY J. FREEDBERG, JR.

National Journal: Rescue Me, April 22, 2000

While the case of Elian Gonzalez transfixes the nation, the U.S. Coast Guard flounders with crews that are young and inexperienced, with too little money and ancient boats and planes. And whether it's to deal with drug smugglers, Cuban refugees, fishing poachers, cruise ships or small boats in trouble, the Coast Guard has to take the call. In an in depth report the National Journal *describes the Coast Guard's woes—too many missions, the on-going money chase for adequate funding, and its quest for a high tech, high efficiency fleet.*

JEFF GERTH AND SHERYL GAY STOLBERG

The New York Times: Medicine Merchants: Birth of a Blockbuster; Drug Makers Reap Profits On Tax-Backed Research, April 23, 2000

The billions of dollars paid by taxpayers and bestowed by the National Institutes of Health, play an important and increasing role in funding the university laboratories that are developing new prescription drugs. So why does the same glaucoma drug, Xalatan, cost French patients $18.78 and Americans $44.85? The New York Times *reveals that not only do drug companies buy the rights to these drugs from universities for almost nothing, but that Federal officials have abandoned or ignored policies that could lead to lower prices for medicine in this country.*

JANE O. HANSEN

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution: Georgia's Forgotten Children: Justice Undone; Bungled investigations let killers off
December 5, 1999 through April 23, 2000

In an on-going series, Hansen has unearthed Georgia's horrifying secret—a child protective system which failed 844 children who died in six years from "accidents," neglect, and abuse. From parents to child welfare agencies and juvenile courts, to mental health clinics, no one is being held accountable when a child dies at home. In nearly half the cases, the state had an open file, and was supposedly actively looking into allegations of abuse.

THE MONTHLY JOURNALISM AWARD is presented each month to one or more newspaper, magazine, radio, or television stories (or series of stories) that demonstrate a commitment to the public interest. We are particularly interested in reporting that explains the successes and failures of government agencies at all levels and of other institutions such as the media, corporations, unions, and foundations that contribute to the existence or solution of public problems. Please send nominations (including two copies of the article or broadcast text) to The Washington Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009. Or e-mail us at **editors@washingtonmonthly.com**. Nominations for stories run in May 2000 are due June 1, 2000.

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Greenspan? Gipper? Gates?

Republicans can't bear to give Clinton credit for the economic boom. But they should.

BY NICHOLAS THOMPSON

IN THE EIGHTH INNING OF THE FIRST GAME of the 1954 World Series, the New York Giants brought in Don Liddle to pitch to Cleveland Indians' slugger Vic Wertz. Liddle's pitch was down the center of the plate and Wertz crushed it. The ball rocketed 425 feet to deep center field where Willie Mays dashed back, glanced over his shoulder, stretched out his arms, and made a dazzling catch often considered to be the greatest in baseball history. According to legend, Liddle returned to the dugout and said to a teammate, "Well, I got my man out."

To his opponents, Bill Clinton is Don Liddle. The economy is booming on his watch, but only because of the work of others. Larry Lindsay, George Bush's chief economic adviser, suggests that Ronald Reagan is the real Willie Mays. Conservative pundit Robert Novak thanks entrepreneurs and says that giving credit for the boom to Clinton is like ascribing "the Johnstown flood" to "a leaky toilet in Altoona." Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott joked recently that "Some people say 'Well Bill and Al deserve the credit.' I agree. Bill Gates and Alan Greenspan."

Of course Republicans are going to try to pry all the credit away from Clinton before the elections. They can't run against unemployment (it's down), productivity (it's up), inflation (it's barely rising), or the budget deficit (we've got surpluses). Most of all, as the President says, "They can't run against the longest economic expansion in history." Almost by necessity, they have to run on the grounds that Clinton, and consequently Gore, has merely been a fortunate bystander. If they can make that stick, George W. Bush may be able to neutralize the Democrats' strongest argument; if they can't, Gore has a much clearer line to victory. And, unfortunately for Republican partisans, they've got a tough case to make.

Agendas

Presidents don't run the economy in a real sense. They don't write business plans and they don't pour concrete. They rarely inspire workers to get out of bed in the morning, and they don't even directly set interest rates. According to Bob Woodward of *The Washington Post*, when Clinton began to lay out his first economic plan, he said to his advisors: "You mean to tell me that the success of my program and my reelection hinges on the Federal Reserve and a bunch of fucking bond traders?"

To a significant extent, the answer was yes. A president can't will an economy to health, and it is extremely hard for him even to legislate it. But although a president may not have his hands on all of the country's economic levers, he can at least make sure that they are greased and synchronized. He can make sure that the Federal Reserve and the White House are acting in concert. He can't control bond traders, but he can understand the games they play. He can increase consumer confidence; he can help smooth capitalism's sharp edges.

It didn't take long for Clinton to figure all of this out, and it didn't take long for him to develop his economic strategy: Appoint (and listen to) the smartest non-ideological technocrats around, work like hell to keep the Fed and the bond markets happy, avoid disasters, and give your most wild-eyed political opponents enough rope to hang themselves but not enough to mess up the balance you've found. It's not a strategy that brings thunderous applause in campaign speeches, nor is it the public-investment strategy that Clinton laid out in his 1992 campaign treatise, "Putting People First." But combined with Clinton's intelligence and good sense of timing, it's a strategy that has worked during the globalized gyrations and technological boom of the '90s. He may not be Willie Mays, but he's still miles ahead of Don Liddle.

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Balance

The most memorable line from Clinton's 1992 campaign was James Carville's: "It's the economy, stupid." The recession of '90-'91 was over, but productivity was low and the budget deficit had become a national burden. As Ross Perot and Clinton supporters relentlessly pointed out, the national debt had grown into the equivalent of a 267-mile-high stack of 1,000 dollar bills. The government hadn't run a surplus since 1969, but most of the debt came from Ronald Reagan's quixotic attempt to end stagflation (he succeeded) and raise revenues (he failed) through a tax-cut-and-spend policy based on decreased top marginal tax rates and increased military expenditures.

Bush in turn was virtually helpless against the charges of fiscal irresponsibility. He had built the debt with Reagan and, swamped by the bailout of the collapsed savings and loans, punted when given an opportunity to tackle the budget problems early in his term when the economy was still growing. It was only in 1990 that he belatedly bit down, raised taxes, and pushed congressional discretionary spending caps: courageous moves that left him to be pummeled for breaking his "read my lips" promise. Bush seemed ill at ease dealing with domestic issues, he did too little too late, and, when the economy began to slow, the debt climbed and confidence in the U.S. economy sank. Interest rates were sky-high and when Iraqi tanks rolled into Kuwait sending oil prices upwards in 1990, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan moved too slowly to reduce rates and prevent a recession. Bush's chance for victory plummeted with the economy and its belated "jobless recovery" as his term ended.

The sagging economy gave Clinton an issue to run on, and the newly-elected President began to counter the downward spiral of confidence before he even took office. In December of 1992, one month before his inauguration, Clinton summoned 300 of the nation's top economists to Little Rock and took notes as they batted ideas back and forth and C-SPAN beamed the images to the country. Even his enemies concede that Clinton is smart and he impressed people with his knowledge, ability to learn, and obvious desire to deal with economic issues head-on. Afterwards, *The New York Times* editorialized that: "Mr. Clinton promised voters that he alone would make the important economic decisions. Judging from this week's performance, he's up to the task."

Soon thereafter, interest rates on long-term bonds dropped. The markets suddenly had confidence in the young president from Arkansas. He was not a stereotypical Democrat who disliked Wall Street and capitalism too much to understand them. Interest rates are essentially the price of money—how much do you have to pay back down the road to get money now?—and depend on supply and demand. When the federal government runs a deficit, it needs to borrow money—leaving other borrowers scrambling for lenders and forcing up interest rates. Conversely, when government runs a surplus, there's more money around for everyone to borrow, interest rates drop, and it's cheaper for families to buy homes and for companies to buy machines.

Markets are influenced by many factors, but rates continued to drop as confidence in Clinton increased. In 1993, Clinton proposed a budget that aimed at fiscal balance through an increase in tax rates on the affluent and a decrease in military spending—Reaganomics turned upside down. Interest rates dropped again. A few months later, as the budget proposal seemed imperiled and the new president appeared to be walking around with two left shoes on, rates drifted upwards. Finally, in August 1993, after a harrowing battle during which Clinton lobbied until hoarse, the president's budget passed the House and Senate by one vote each and interest rates dropped again. The yield on 10-year Treasury debt had gone from nearly 7 percent at the election to 5.25 percent just after the budget passed.

Republicans, of course, weren't pleased. Although they fought for much of the mid-'90s to accelerate efforts to balance the budget, not one Republican voted for the plan. Newt Gingrich told *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* at the time that the budget's tax increase would "kill jobs and lead to a recession, and the recession will force people off work and onto unemployment and will actually increase the deficit." Sen. Phil Gramm called it "a one-way ticket to a recession" and John Kasich, currently the House budget committee chairman, told the *Congressional Record* that the budget was "like a snake bite. The venom is going to be injected into the body of this economy, in our judgment, and it's going to spread throughout the body and it's going to begin to kill the jobs that Americans have."

The budget did pass and no venom was injected. The president paid a political price when the increased taxes of the budget bill worked against the Democrats in the Republicans' congressional victory a year later. But Clinton and the economy would soon reap the benefits of increased economic confidence and loose credit. Most importantly, Clinton

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had also sent a signal to the Federal Reserve that he was fiscally responsible and that the country's economic needs could be on a par with his own political ones.

Dancing with the Fed

The Federal Reserve Board, virtually embodied by Chairman Alan Greenspan since 1987, controls the amount of money moving through the national banking system and hence has even more direct power than the White House over the ebb and flow of interest rates. If the board of the Fed wants to lower rates and ramp up the economy, they put money into the system and decrease the rates at which national banks borrow from each other and the government. If they want to dampen growth, they do the opposite.

Not surprisingly, chairmen of the Federal Reserve and presidents have traditionally worked at cross purposes. The president wants as much economic expansion as possible at all times during his tenure; the Fed wants sustainable growth and cautiously, apolitically, guards against over-stimulation and subsequent inflation. A president, naturally, benefits if every person in the country who wants a job has one. The Fed chairman knows that prices go up when wages go up; and wages tend to go up when job applicants are hard to find. As a result, the president often finds himself pressing down on the economy's accelerator while the Fed chairman's foot grinds down on the brakes. When this happens, as it did at some point for each of Clinton's five predecessors, the economy tends to stall.

Clinton broke this cycle by thinking ahead and accepting some short-term pain. Clinton knew that if he worked to balance the budget and did the things that make bond-traders happy, Greenspan would keep interest rates low; when the president's keeping the party under control, there is no reason for the Fed chairman to take away the punch bowl. Clinton also appointed sophisticated economists, businesspeople, and seasoned Washington insiders to run his economic policy: Lloyd Bentsen, Robert Rubin, Alice Rivlin, Alan Blinder, Laura Tyson, and Leon Panetta, for example. They spoke the same language as Greenspan, understood the bond markets, and were able to map a path to the chairman's heart.

Of course, Clinton wasn't always fully content with the Fed. When the economy began to show signs of inflation in 1994 and 1995, the Fed did in fact move to increase interest rates—putting people out of work and hurting Clinton politically. Privately, according to close aides, Clinton was furious. But he never went public and he never tried to countermand the Fed. He never criticized the Fed chairman and relations between the two remained close, beginning with the president's first State of the Union address when Greenspan was invited to sit between Hillary Clinton and Tipper Gore in the House gallery. Clinton had made a decision to trust Greenspan; he stuck with it, and was repaid. The Fed backed off its rate hikes in 1995 after heated internal debate and avoided strangling the expansion, a common error historically of central banks worldwide. Following those rate hikes, the Fed relaxed rates slightly and then barely touched a thing for the next four years, even as the economy boomed and the unemployment rate slid well below the six percent level that most economists thought would lead to inflation the same way that winter leads to spring.

When the president's keeping the party under control, there's no reason for the Fed chairman to take away the punch bowl.

Working with Newt

The major threat to the balance that Clinton and the Fed had built came in 1994 when the Gingrich revolt swept Republicans into control of Congress. Clinton and the Fed had reached an understanding on restraint, moving slowly, and getting the fundamentals right. Gingrich wanted to wrap his hands around the economy's neck and turn the damn thing upside down.

There were two dangerous potential outcomes when Gingrich took the tiller: that nothing would get done and that Gingrich would do whatever he wanted. Clinton served as a bulwark against both possibilities. He co-opted some of the most sensible Republican ideas (like changing the culture of welfare) and moved them toward the center. He also used his political dexterity to slow down, and usually stop, the Republicans' worst ideas—from adding endless layers of bureaucracy for every environmental rule to pushing tax cuts in an economy in danger of overheating. Tax cuts make sense when an economy is

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sputtering—they can lead to increased demand and consumption that helps a country recover—and they probably helped the U.S. to an extent in the early '80s. But they don't make sense during a boom. If the Republicans had passed them during the expansion, the Fed would almost certainly have raised interest rates; once again, one foot on the gas and one foot on the brakes.

Clinton's responsible effect on Congress was seen most clearly in 1998 when it became apparent that we were going to have at least several years of budget surpluses—in large part, to their credit, because Republicans had held Clinton's feet to the fire on balancing the budget. As soon as the surpluses appeared, however, Republicans resumed their call for tax cuts. Clinton recognized that the prudent thing would be to save the surpluses and pointedly announced during his State of the Union that we should use surpluses to "save social security first," which, in practice, means keeping the money in the treasury. The Social Security lobby is one of the strongest in the country, the phrase resonated politically, and the Republicans had no choice but to give in. Almost instantly, the wind was taken out of the sails of the tax-cutting ship, no doubt for the overall good of the economy.

Success through inaction in one area shouldn't be enough to elevate a good man and a very competent central banker to divinity.

But Clinton didn't just manage the Republicans well, he also maneuvered his own party into sound, economically expansionary ideas. In 1993, while Congress was still Democratic, he pushed NAFTA through a reluctant Congress and against the wishes of labor unions, one of his core constituencies. George Bush and Ronald Reagan had started momentum toward free trade but, just as it took a Republican president to normalize relationships with communist China, it may have taken a centrist Democratic president to sell free trade to the American public—and it certainly took a Democratic president to get it through a Democratic Congress. The impact of NAFTA has been less than the ongoing and angry debate over trade might make you believe—trade with Canada and Mexico equals about two and a half percent of U.S. GDP—and there is a serious downside to globalization in worker dislocation and downward pressure on environmental and safety standards. But the race to the bottom hasn't been nearly as dramatic as people feared, and the benefits of increased exports and inflation held in check by reduced prices and steady wages have surely contributed to keeping the economy healthy.

Similarly, Clinton's strategy in dealing with the Democrats has followed a positive pattern: Meet labor unions, and other organizations that challenge the sharp elbows of capitalism, half-way and try to combine economic growth and relatively equitable distribution. When Republicans tried to take away the unions' right to donate to political campaigns, Clinton not surprisingly defended them. But he defied the unions by allowing increased immigration of high-tech workers when our national shortage became clear, and he has been adamant about open trade.

Clinton has followed a parallel path with environmentalists, another core Democratic voting block. He has rejected grand protection and conservation schemes that alienate business, like strengthening the Endangered Species Act. But he has promoted economically based measures like carbon-emissions trading schemes and, internationally, debt-for-nature swaps. On issues of income inequality, Clinton has also avoided sweeping social programs; but he did expand the earned income tax credit in 1993 and won increases in the minimum wage in both 1996 and 2000. Partly as a result—although it took a while, and it would have been better to have taken more substantial steps sooner—the boom is finally spreading wealth fairly evenly through society. The unemployment rate has dropped to historic lows in every racial group and, between 1993 and 1998, annual income increased by 10.3 percent for the poorest 20 percent of Americans compared with 11.7 percent for the richest 20 percent. Those numbers are slightly deceptive since income doesn't take into account stock appreciation; but as a comparison, consider that, between 1981 and 1993, income for the poorest quintile dropped by 4.4 percent while increasing by 26.4 percent for the most affluent.

Birth of the Cool

After balancing the budget, winning the wars with Congress, and setting a sound but innovative

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economic path, Clinton focused on keeping the engine running and the train on the track. When dangers appeared on the horizon, he dealt with them. When Mexico's currency collapsed under the pressures created by jittery currency traders and free-wheeling investors, Clinton, against political advice, worked to develop an economic bailout package that helped to get our southern neighbor back on its feet. After the Asian economies went into freefall, threatening the world economy, Clinton didn't panic. He made sure that Rubin got on the phone to assure the financial markets and he helped to organize an increase in IMF support. When Russia defaulted on its debt in August of 1998, Clinton tracked down Rubin and the White House kept everyone cool. Greenspan, who had been having breakfasts with Rubin weekly since the latter became treasury secretary, rapidly decreased interest rates three times, goosing the U.S. economy and reassuring world financial markets.

As a result, the United States has avoided calamity and consumer confidence has flourished. And when an economy is structurally sound, confidence is the energy that pulses through the circuits and drives the system. When Clinton came to office, the economic mood was best captured by the title of economist Paul Krugman's book: *The Age of Diminished Expectations*. In 2000, Clinton's last year, the mood is probably best captured by James Glassman and Kevin Hasset's *Dow 36,000*. Our stock market has shot up from 3,000 to 10,000 under Clinton's watch and economic optimism is higher than ever before. Consumer spending is well up, as is corporate investment. Everybody in the world wants dollars and the United States has remained an island of stability as other nations' economies have bounced up and down throughout the decade.

There are dangers and it's quite possible that the economy is now heading into a dip. But the overall trends powered by consumer confidence have been overwhelmingly positive. Even our national savings rate, the scourge of economic doomsayers, has actually improved slightly over the past eight years. Personal savings have worrisomely dropped but government savings have dramatically improved and compensated as the budget has moved into balance.

How much credit does Clinton get for this? He surely gets credit for extinguishing the budget deficit: the number one source of economic anxiety during the early 1990s. He also gets credit for the cool confidence he has given off while weathering storm after storm and for pushing policies that have seemed to a majority of Americans, including a majority of businesspeople, to be sensible and sound. He has also set an example: He trimmed the government's size, cut the White House staff by 25 percent, and has been judicious about raising White House salaries. The percentage of people who answer in the affirmative when asked whether they approve of Clinton's economic management now stands at 75 percent. This is a startling peak to which his ratings have been slowly and steadily climbing, with a couple of downturns, since January of 1995 when they first passed 50 percent. It is also an indication of how Clinton's policies have helped spur the confidence fueling so much of the boom.

Credit the Fed

Critics of Clinton counter that Greenspan has actually been pulling the strings. This argument rests first on the core principle that Clinton's impact has been indirect, if it exists at all. Clinton can influence interest rates by fighting Congress to balance the budget and by trying to cajole the bond markets; he can pass sound economic policies, but only after protracted political struggles. If Greenspan's mood sours because he suddenly notices that one crucial economic indicator is off, he can yank up interest rates by fiat.

The naysayers' argument is also based on personality. Although Bill and Alan do have a good working relationship, in many senses Greenspan has built a reputation as the anti-Clinton. Clinton is all exuberance, Greenspan all gravity. Clinton's ideal day would be spent shaking hands; Greenspan's would be spent reading charts in the bathtub. If there's been a steady hand and a knowing prognosticator who has inspired confidence, the argument goes, it must have been Greenspan.

Greenspan's reputation does have its advantages—it's reassuring to think that the near-impenetrable complexity of the entire U.S. economy is overseen by a detached wizard sitting in a castle next to a stack of spreadsheets—and Republicans have tried to build it up as much as possible. Phil Gramm calls him "the greatest central banker in history," and John McCain even said during the campaign that "if Mr. Greenspan should happen to die, God forbid ... I would prop him up and put a pair of dark sunglasses on him, and keep him as long as we could." Fed chairmen, even when successful, have historically been relatively unknown (how much do you know about William McChesney Martin?), but everyone knows Greenspan. In 1998, Gennifer Flowers

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echoed the conventional wisdom of Clinton's opponents when she told Larry King that if Clinton were to resign the economy might "have a little bit of problem for a couple of days," but "Alan Greenspan would step in there and make sure that our economy would become healthy right away."

But the argument for Greenspan is not entirely persuasive. Greenspan has had a successful career, but, as you probably wouldn't know from Republican senatorial rhetoric, his long-term track record doesn't quite mirror the Oracle of Delphi's. In 1980, he promoted Ronald Reagan's supply-side tax policies against the charges of voodoo by describing them as "an exercise in reasonable economics." In 1984, he urged government regulators to exempt Charles Keating's savings and loan from regulatory standards because of its skilled management. In 1987, at his first Fed meeting as chairman, he dramatically raised interest rates, contributing significantly to the stock market crash one month later. In 1990, he failed to anticipate the recession until it had already begun. Then, fearing oil-driven inflation after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, he refused to decrease rates, letting the recession take root and, ultimately, helping to drive Bush out of office.

Under Clinton, Greenspan's record has also been mixed. He hiked rates in 1994 and 1995 by three percent, in large part because of a fear that we had dropped below the "natural rate of unemployment" of about six percent. The hikes did have a positive effect on the banking sector, but Greenspan later seemed to admit an error when he spun around and decreased rates by 0.75 percent not long thereafter—a sound move considering that unemployment has somehow been able to drop below four percent without triggering inflation. Greenspan has also hiked rates six times since June of 1999. Why? Again mainly because of a fear of future inflation, even though inflation rates are exceptionally low and even though Greenspan admits that our current economic measurements overstate price increases considerably. As further evidence of the improbability of inflation, long-term interest rates are now bouncing around slightly below short-term ones—a fairly unusual occurrence that indicates that bond traders, notorious inflation hawks, see future price increases as decidedly improbable.

Furthermore, although Greenspan is rightly concerned about the impacts of a bursting stock market bubble, he has not taken any of the few relatively simple steps that he could have to let a little air out quickly: for example, raising the restrictions on margin trading (buying stocks with money borrowed from your broker). He instead has tried to burst it indirectly, and ineffectively, through rate hikes, starting as early as 1994 when the Dow was running at about 4,000. According to a recent *Wall Street Journal* report, after raising interest rates slightly and watching the market slip in February of that year, Greenspan told his Fed colleagues on a conference call: "We partially broke the back of an emerging speculation in equities ... We had a desirable effect." Six years and six thousand points later, Greenspan is still kicking the market in the shins every few months, but he's not quite having the effect that you might expect a wizard to have.

In addition to his quick reflexes and teamwork with Rubin and Clinton during the international crisis of the last four years, Greenspan does deserve tremendous credit for one thing: not raising interest rates between 1995 and 1999 (with one small exception in 1997), even as inflation hawks on the Fed pressed him to put on the brakes. Greenspan tested economic theory and he challenged conventional wisdom, along with his prior opinions, by letting unemployment slide gradually down. In retrospect, this has been a brilliant decision. Even so, success through inaction in one area shouldn't be enough to elevate a good man and a very competent central banker to divinity.

Going to California

There is a final argument that neither Clinton nor Greenspan matters much. While they've been setting macroeconomic policy in Washington, 3,000 miles away, computer processors have been improving at a rate never seen in any industry before and the Internet has become one of the greatest productivity-boosters in history. When the world is fully wired, management can track exactly where every truck in its company is, the unemployed can find jobs while surfing the Web in their pajamas, and businesses can cut out layers and layers out of their bureaucracy.

Clinton did have a small role in helping further this technological revolution: A market offering easy credit through low interest rates assisted venture capitalists and Silicon Valley startups in their borrowing. Clinton also pushed through tariff reductions on high-technology products well before it was clear how important information technology could be. Greenspan also was one of the first economists to recognize the potentially revolutionary impact of computer technology and that was one reason why he didn't raise rates between '95 and '99. Still, at the most, Clinton and Greenspan helped to set the scene; they didn't etch circuits into silicon with stunning rates of efficiency; they didn't come up with brilliant plans for startups; and, even if they were both slightly ahead of the curve, they didn't com-

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pletely understand or anticipate the technology revolution until it exploded around them.

But is the technology revolution the elusive Willie Mays that Republicans are so desperately searching for? Doubtful. It has mattered a lot, but it hasn't been everything. For one, only eight percent of the workforce is employed in information technology. As importantly, although there's no question that computers do make companies run more efficiently, there are also serious drawbacks. It takes a while to make the things work, systems become obsolete quickly, and employees often end up wasting time through endless chat groups or game playing—the source of about $100 billion lost annually according to a recent study by SBT Accounting Systems.

A decade ago, Robert Solow, an economics Nobel Laureate, famously said, "You can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics"—a notion confirmed by economic studies throughout the past decade which have concluded that information technology, no matter how funky and cool, has been slow to improve our efficiency. Productivity rates stayed constant from the beginning of the computer revolution in the early '70s until about 1996, when it finally started to creep up. In the last year and a half, it has started to improve more dramatically, but the improvement is coming too late to support the argument that computers have done anything more than extend the boom. They will surely bring great benefits in the future, and they're doing a lot to keep the economy strong today, but they didn't build or power the economic expansion.

More importantly, computer technology has also been booming in every other industrialized country on earth: in Thailand, in Japan, and in France. All three of these countries have been in recent economic downturns and not one other country has done nearly as well as the United States. Why not? Maybe because of cultural factors, labor market structure, flukes, whatever. But also because, although computers are important, a country's success still depends on political and economic leadership.

And the Winner Is

In short, real people, making real decisions, helped to create the conditions for this economic boom. Paul Volcker stamped out inflation and Ronald Reagan oversaw the demise of the Soviet threat that ultimately allowed Clinton to cut defense expenditures. George Bush started to make the move toward budget balancing and computer entrepreneurs from Linus Torvalds to Bill Gates did create technology that's changing the way we get things done. Alan Greenspan skillfully analyzed the economy and recognized which way the wind was blowing when he took his foot off the brake in 1995 and kept it off until 1999. If the Academy Awards were giving out an award for the economy, Greenspan might win best supporting actor, Gates would win for special effects, and Volcker, Reagan, and Bush could vie for best set design.

Clinton however deserves more. He showed a great sense of timing and a sense of where he was. He's the one who finally learned how to get the White House and the Federal Reserve to work as a team; he balanced the budget; he found a successful middle path between traditionally sparring economic groups and ideas; he ultimately found a balance between high-paced capitalism and a sustainable economic expansion; and he has played a leading role in the consumer confidence that has been so important to the boom. No, Clinton didn't create the economic boom, but he should take home the award for best director. ●

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Tidbits Outrages

Representation without taxation

A study by the Internal Revenue Service finds that members of Congress and their staffs are $10.5 million in arrears on their income taxes.

Betty Crocker got 10 years

Police officers in Lexington, N.C. recently announced the department's "largest methamphetamine bust." Their suspect was held in jail for nearly two weeks before they discovered the "flour-looking substance" they seized was actually flour.

Bobby Knight, take note

After Ivory Coast's soccer team was eliminated from the African Nations Cup in January, the country's military ruler, Gen. Robert Guei, had the team arrested and put in a military prison for two days.

They prefer "Biped Companion"

A San Francisco-based animal activist group wants to ban the word "owner" from being used to describe people who have pets.

Next: "Ken the Intern"

Mattel Inc. has teamed up with The White House Project, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group that promotes women candidates, to produce a "Barbie for President" doll.

People fake it all the time

In January, a New York state judge ruled after four hearings in three years that Krystyna Maliszewska, 51, of Brooklyn was not eligible for workers compensation because she had not provided the proper "medical evidence" that her leg had been amputated.

Why the British Empire fell

British Army Major David Senior, on trial for inflating ration claims for his men and pocketing the $30,000 surplus, defended himself by declaring he acted under the influence of too much tea.

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Private Matters

Why we should be able to keep some things to ourselves

By Paul M. Barrett

THE "UNWANTED GAZE" OF THIS BOOK'S title alludes to "hezzek re'iyyah," a concept in Jewish law, author Jeffrey Rosen tells us, which means "the injury caused by seeing." He quotes the *Encyclopedia Talmudit*: "Even the smallest intrusion into private space by the unwanted gaze causes damage, because the injury caused by seeing cannot be measured."

THE UNWANTED GAZE: The Destruction of Privacy in America
By Jeffrey Rosen
Random House, $24.95

Jewish jurisprudence of the Middle Ages provided for a legal action to stop a neighbor from building a window from which he could peer into your courtyard, Rosen notes wistfully in this collection of essays on how protections of privacy have eroded in modern-day America. He believes we would be better off today if more people could sue over their privacy being invaded—one of the many provocative ideas in a book that bounces from medieval legal theory to Monica Lewinsky.

As we increasingly expose our thoughts and preferences by means of e-mail, Internet retail, chatrooms, and the like, we are losing control of how we are perceived, of our very identities, Rosen asserts. Fragmentary personal data are taken out of context and distorted in a world of shrinking attention spans. An unusual scholar-journalist who writes for *The New Republic* and *The New Yorker*, Rosen combines a facility with legal history and an apparent fascination with icons of contemporary political scandal. His quirky intellectual leaps may leave some readers a bit dizzy, and he sometimes seems to choose examples more for their celebrity dazzle than their actual value in illustrating general assertions. But overall, there is much to learn and debate in this lively book.

Two interwoven topics chiefly concern Rosen. First, there are the familiar incursions by law and technology into people's intimate dealings and expression. He wants to curb the unwanted gaze of government and employers into the lives of ordinary people. Second, he argues that some types of sexual harassment are misconceived as discrimination rather than as a form of invasion of privacy. The unwanted gaze that concerns him in this regard is not that of the leering male predator, but of the employer or prosecutor who, in the name of vindicating gender equality, intrudes on personal relations or expression.

Rosen excels at concise legal history for the layman. The best parts of his book explain in bursts of five pages or less the unlikely ways that legal ideas have evolved. There is, for example, the tale of how Anglo-American legal protection of private papers has eroded since Englishman John Wilkes, an 18th-century member of Parliament, successfully sued King George's minions for breaking into his London house in 1763 and seizing his diaries and other writings. The U.S. Supreme Court, at least through the late 19th century, Rosen explains, embraced the spirit of the Wilkes case—that government rifling of a person's records or papers violated principles of liberty, property, and privacy. But in the 20th century, the high court allowed the federal government to chip away at that view in the name of controlling white-collar crime.

Rosen deftly puts in context such ironies as legendarily-liberal Justice William Brennan contributing a key 1967 pro-law enforcement opinion empowering authorities armed with a search warrant to seize not just "fruits of a crime," such as contraband, but also

PAUL M. BARRETT *covers legal affairs for* The Wall Street Journal.

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papers that might be considered "mere evidence." The Warren Court's effort to constrain violent and racist police in the South by excluding evidence obtained from unconstitutional searches created the danger of seriously hampering legitimate police work, Rosen observes. That prompted the Court to pretend that such intrusions on privacy as planting bugs in subjects' clothing and rummaging in their trash weren't searches and seizures at all. "Any society that ties its privacy rights to the rights of the accused," Rosen writes, "is a society in which the legal protections for privacy will quickly evaporate."

He brings us up to the present with two well-known political sex cases: those of Bob Packwood, the former Oregon senator, who in 1994 was forced to turn over his diaries to the Senate Ethics Committee as a part of the sexual-misconduct investigation of his cloddish advances on female staffers and lobbyists; and Monica Lewinsky, the former White House intern, from whose home computer Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr (among his other excesses) was able to extract drafts of never-sent love letters to President Bill Clinton. The official overreaching in these two instances was perfectly legal under current standards, Rosen notes, demonstrating that almost no secret can be protected anymore against government prying.

Rosen uses stories like Packwood's and especially Lewinsky's to draw the reader in and add a little zip and torn-from-the-headlines topicality to his discussion. The problem with these examples is that they are so idiosyncratic. Consider Lewinsky: She came under the scrutiny of a (now nearly-extinct) independent counsel's office trying to bring down a president. What's more, the counsel, Starr, didn't only ogle her love letters: He took the bizarre step of including them in his lurid report to Congress, which was released on the Internet and eventually published. As Rosen himself acknowledges, it was the publicity, more than the search of her hard drive, that harmed Lewinsky. Thankfully, few of us need to fear a public undressing of that sort; our secrets aren't the stuff of Capitol Hill vendettas or media crazes.

Another aspect of the Lewinsky saga makes it a strange and slightly distracting example. While there is no law against repeatedly having adulterous oral sex with the president of the United States, a woman who does it in and around the Oval Office might reasonably be expected to anticipate that word could get out, causing her some loss of privacy.

E-Snooping

In other sections of the book, Rosen ably surveys how the transformation of the workplace by e-mail and Internet use have made it possible for employers to monitor their workers' every keystroke. The greatest danger of this relatively new situation, in his view, is that bits and pieces of information—fragmentary e-mail exchanges or the trail of World Wide Web visits—may be wrenched out of context to brand us as what we are not. Of interest to technophiles, Rosen offers a kind of consumers guide to new services and software that may address many of his concerns by, for example, encrypting communication. Technology, he observes, could actually be used to rebuild weakened privacy protections.

In his most stimulating argument, which spans several chapters, Rosen claims that "the heart of the debate about workplace privacy at the end of the 20th century" concerns the interaction between sexual harassment law and employers' enhanced ability to monitor employees' electronic chatter and Internet explorations.

Goaded by feminist legal theorists, the Supreme Court in 1986 created a new category of liability under the federal statute that bars discrimination based on sex. Employers henceforth were responsible not just for sleep-with-me-or-you're-fired harassment, but also for the existence of a vaguely defined "hostile environment" toward women which could be created by taunts, jokes, colleagues' consensual flirtation, or fornication. The test was whether the offensive words and actions created an atmosphere "sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions" of the victim's job. Rosen correctly observes that most large companies, and many small ones, have instituted surveillance policies to make sure that dirty e-mail jokes and Internet girlie pictures aren't used to create a sexually hostile environment. The policies are eminently-rational defense strategies in our quick-draw litigation society, especially since the courts have failed to provide clear definitions of terms such as "severe or pervasive" offense.

Rosen wants to convince us that a purported cure for what might be termed frat-house sexual harassment (as opposed to the sleep-with-me-or-you're-fired variety) has turned out to be worse than the ailment. Combined with now-common electronic snooping technology, hostile-environment liability has become, according to this argument, the greatest threat to privacy facing workers. Rosen believes he has a tidy fix for the problem. The real harm suffered by women subjected to the offensive comments or unwanted advances of frat-house harassment, he writes, is not discrimination. It is an

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invasion of privacy: "being objectified and simplified and judged out of context in a world of short attention-spans."

Hostile-environment liability should be wiped out, he argues, because it makes illegal too many possibly innocuous actions—How could I tell she didn't want to go out with me, if I didn't ask a few times?—and encourages companies to turn themselves into electronic police-states. Rosen suggests that courts replace hostile-environment liability with an expanded right for women to sue over their privacy being violated. By replacing a discrimination theory with a tort theory, Rosen believes we would solve many ills. Victims would have to sue actual individual tormentors, rather than faceless corporations; that will "encourage individual responsibility," he writes, and deter avaricious plaintiffs' lawyers who prefer going after the deep pockets of companies. Since "invasion of privacy law focuses on speech targeted at a particular woman that has the purpose or effect of insulting or humiliating her," the Rosen tort would make it harder for overly sensitive women "to object to dirty jokes, overheard remarks, or pinups in private cubicles," he asserts. Randy e-mail expression would flourish, as would office-generated "consensual affairs and flirtations."

Sounds fun. But there are reasons to be suspicious of Rosen's alternative medicine. For one thing, at the critical point when he introduces this part of his argument, he writes that hostile-environment liability, "originally designed to protect the privacy and dignity of women and men in the workplace, has, on *several occasions*, permitted unreasonable invasions of the privacy and dignity of women and men in the workplace." (My italics.)

Several occasions? If that's all there have been since 1986, you might classify the whole problem as one of tolerable side effects, rather than a cure worse than the disease. Among Rosen's illustrations is Paula Jones' harassment suit against Bill Clinton, which became the excuse for an endless investigation of the president's sex life, including the Lewinsky affair. Again, the national political consequences of litigation concerning Clinton's libido—not to mention the important roles of Lucianne Goldberg, Linda Tripp, and all the rest of the weird anti-Clinton plotters—diminish the usefulness of this example. Was there really anything typical about the Clinton-Jones-Lewinsky saga?

What Rosen wants to do is cut down on sexual harassment suits and increase opportunities for confidential office communication, sex-tinged and otherwise. His new privacy tort would free "employers to reconstruct private spaces, inside and outside the workplace, in which employees can express themselves without fear of being monitored and observed."

A couple of reactions jump to mind. When people in my office want to talk about something personal, they typically don't use e-mail. They go to the diner across the street. I've never seen one of the big bosses there.

There's no law against having adulterous oral sex with the president in the oval office, but a woman who does it could expect the word to get out.

As for sexual harassment, Rosen may underestimate the healthy deterrent effect that hostile-environment liability has had in making some bosses think twice before hitting on subordinates or tolerating frat house ugliness. Misguided plaintiffs and greedy lawyers abuse hostile-environment law the same way they make a mockery of other legal rules meant to protect real victims. The Supreme Court has failed to provide guidance on the parameters of this area of law, leaving lower courts to grope in the dark. Tinkering may be in order. But that doesn't mean that it was foolish to worry about sexual harassment that falls short of quid-pro-quo demands. Gender relations on the job have improved vastly over the past two decades; it seems a safe guess that potential corporate liability had something to do with that.

Rosen's enthusiasm for drawing attention-grabbing connections sometimes gets him in trouble. But better that than another safe, mournful account of how nothing is private anymore. The author deserves credit for raising important questions in a lively, serious-minded, and challenging work. ●

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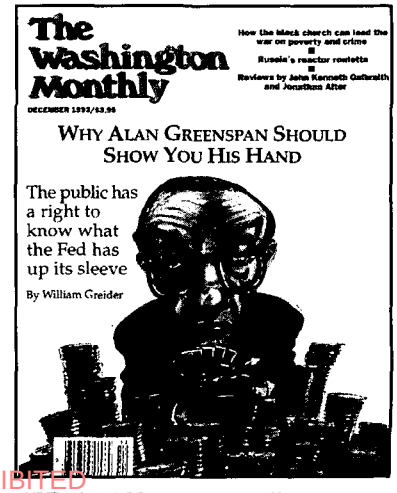

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Political Booknotes

Hillary Wars I

By Mary McGrory

LAURA INGRAHAM IS A BEAUTIFUL, brainy blonde, who at 34 has her own television show and no end of high-profile escorts. But she is not happy. In fact, she is hopping mad. Hillary Clinton makes her crazy. Like several other conservative women, she has taken pen in hand hoping to drive it like a stake through the First Lady's heart.

THE HILLARY TRAP: Looking for Power in All the Wrong Places
by Laura Ingraham
Hyperion, $23.95

Laura Ingraham doesn't know Hillary Rodham Clinton. She doesn't judge her as a Methodist or a human being. She says her religion is between her and God, and she relents enough in an epilogue to say that "in many ways she must be a good person." But she sees her as a one-woman social crime wave, at least partially responsible for "schools that don't teach ... or reinforce values parents try to teach at home; a workplace constricted by government edicts ... [that] end up hurting women ... for a permissive sexual culture ... " and, oh yes, a rise in goddess worship and witchcraft.

Ingraham's thesis, that the First Lady is really a faux feminist, is hardly original, and she restates it many times. This one, which occurs early, gives the flavor: "I wondered how a woman so impeccably educated and credentialed and prepared for independence could have made such a devil's bargain. Was this the bargain of feminism? Were women now to submit to any indignity, even a sham marriage, for access to power, celebrity, and fame?"

She sounds the same note again on page 142: "She's either a dupe who loves her man so much she's willing to sacrifice all dignity for his sake, or a Machiavellian who craves power so much she'll do anything to keep it."

Her point is that as a role model Hillary is an outrage: "an old-fashioned doormat," "clinging to her abuser," a betrayed wife who "has made the country safe for infidelity" and tries to trap her sisters into the kind of victimhood she claims for herself.

You can tell from the excerpts that Ingraham is a vehement writer and also something of a nag. She concedes that the women's movement broke down barriers in education, business, and the professions. She got a splendid public school education in Glastonbury, Conn., she attended Dartmouth on scholarship and the University of Virginia Law School. She has had no trouble making her way through the jungles of television journalism. But don't talk to her about sisterhood. She posed in a leopard miniskirt for a cover of the *New York Times Magazine* and liberated women failed to defend her right to choose her clothes. She seems baffled by their criticism. What had she done wrong?

Trashing Hillary can be well paid work. Peggy Noonan, Reagan's elegant speechwriter, is on the best-seller list. Will Laura Ingraham follow her? Maybe New York voters are on the lookout for another how-to-hate-Hillary manual, so they can measure her against her rival for the New York Senate seat, and focus on the future: If she wins in New York, she may be on her way back to the White House.

The Clinton's marriage, which so infuriates Ingraham, who is not married but reveres the institution, may not be a key issue. The Rudy-Donna union, and separation, almost makes Hillary and Bill look like Ozzie and Harriet.

Readers looking for titillating bits about Hillary's private life will find nothing here. Ingraham is attacking her public record: her eager alliance with the teacher unions, who, according to Ingraham, are too busy dodging charges of racism, sexism, and elitism to give our children the best education possible; or Hillary's ceaseless efforts to persuade women that they are defenseless without the help of "educrats," government counsel on "parenting," and federally-provided day care.

Ingraham makes her points with vehemence and plenty of statistics. She rages that concern for women's health issues, the glass ceiling, and equal pay are exaggerated by Hillary and her friends. Many may agree with her about the dumbing-down of public schools, the fatuous legislation that does such things as forbid discrimination against parents in hiring practices. But while reading about Hillary's many traps, readers may feel trapped themselves and begin to think longingly of the taming of the shrew at the word-processor.

Where she lost me was in her impassioned chapter on guns. Laura Ingraham was a "proud" gun-owner until she settled in "the people's Republic of the District of Columbia," which has strict gun laws. She exults over the number of states coming around to concealed carrying of guns. She glorifies women who reject "the sexist, retrograde claptrap" about the dangers of women with guns. One paragraph illustrates her pistol-whipping prose: "Guns are not the only way for a woman to protect herself. If she can fend off a predator with a front kick to the groin or use her car keys to gouge out his eyes ..."

Laura Ingraham has carpet-bombed Hillary, no question about it. I think she has also shot herself in the foot, the way angry people sometimes do.

MARY MCGRORY *is a columnist for* The Washington Post.

Hillary Wars II

By David Brock

PEGGY NOONAN, A FORMER speechwriter for Reagan and Bush whose work frequently appears in *The Wall Street Journal* and *Time*, is often considered to represent the upper level of Republican thinking. But her latest effort, *The Case Against Hillary Clinton*, is an empty book that, if it has any effect at all, can only get Republicans into deeper trouble.

Following a perfunctory discussion of Hillary Clinton's failed health-care initiative, Noonan begins her next chapter by stating: "But I cannot think of a time when she showed herself to be a

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champion by gambling her political capital." Really? Though in one part of the book Noonan acknowledges Mrs. Clinton's role as head of an education commission in Arkansas that won legislative approval and financing for sweeping school reforms, in another section Noonan launches this salvo: "She has not created one program. She has not passed one bill. She has not won one legislative victory." She refers obtusely to Filegate as One of the Great Unsolved Mysteries of the Clinton administration, even though the case has been solved with the Clintons exonerated even by the independent counsel.

THE CASE AGAINST HILLARY CLINTON
by Peggy Noonan
Regan Books, $24.00

Delivered without the faux scholarly apparatus accompanying other Hillary Clinton attack books, much of *The Case Against Hillary Clinton* is literally made up. Page after page is littered with imaginary dialogue and fantasies that belong in a 50-minute session—a 17-page Hollywood speech that Mrs. Clinton never delivered, a fake interview with Tom Brokaw after she loses the Senate race, a fictional scene in which movie producer Harvey Weinstein disrespectfully lights a cigarette in the First Lady's face, a moment when it dawns on Hillary as she flies into LaGuardia that she looks like the Statue of Liberty, a conversation between James Carville and Harold Ickes at Mrs. Clinton's graveside, even a passage where Noonan channels Eleanor Roosevelt to tell us what she would say about Hillary Clinton: "One senses there is something strange there." In the few places where Noonan attempts to deal with real facts and events, her only named source is the fabulist Dick Morris, which leads one to wonder if anything in this book is true.

The Case Against Hillary Clinton boils down to this: Peggy Noonan doesn't like this "highly credentialed rube," this "mere operator," this "person who never ponders what is right," this "squat and grasping" woman. Underlying this judgment is not a "case" in any meaningful sense, but rather a catalogue of personal resentments that, like so much of what is written about Hillary Clinton, tells us more about the author than the subject. Describing her own experience in Massapequa High School on Long Island, Noonan writes, "The Hillarys would be nice to us, would only look at us in the hall and say hello when they were running for senior class president. And then only because every vote counts. So she'd actually talk to people like us, and I wish I could say we told her to drop dead, but we didn't, did we?" Now, Noonan has her chance. Noonan to Hillary: Drop dead.

That Noonan's brand of high-style conservatism is now indistinguishable from that of Rush Limbaugh and Gary Aldrich does not bode well for the party. At this late date, one would think that the Republicans would have realized that angry sentiments, while they still motivate conservative bulk-rate book buyers, are not enough to move voters against the Clintons.

DAVID BROCK *is the author most recently of* The Seduction of Hillary Rodham.

Playing Pandora

By Bill McKibben

MY WIFE WAS COMPLAINING THE other night about some dogs a mile or so down our lonely road. They chase her every time she rides by on her bike, she said; they scared her. "Oh bosh," I replied, "I've gone by them a thousand times and nothing's ever happened." Karmic (and at only 6 stitches almost comic) payback came to me on my morning run just eight hours later.

Hubris usually has a longer incubation period—he who the gods would destroy they first give 2,000 points on the NASDAQ—but as our world speeds up, the cycle of arrogance and downfall seems to be accelerating too. Which is why it's hard to imagine that the millennium has seen a more important book than this slim volume from our finest essayist.

Wendell Berry holds that title precisely because he does not spend most of his time essaying. For four decades he has farmed a small patch of Kentucky, restoring a corner of degraded land to health by concentrating on the small, the particular. In his poems and novels, as well as his collections of essays, he has preached the same gospel: We were made to care for our homes and our neighbors; our satisfaction lies in commitment to the same. He's changed many lives, mine included, but of course he has been swimming upstream against the culture, and the dams just grow taller. Those same four decades have seen the near-destruction of rural economies based on small farming. Our emotional lives have grown ever more self-centered and careless—for proof, one need look only at the statistics on the lives of children, or on the size of our cars and houses, or at the feverish way we spend our money. (Careful societies don't have "negative savings rates.")

At the same time, our view of the future grows ever more grandiose and gaudy. Consider the millennial issues of any magazine you want, for they spoke with a common voice: Whatever temporary problems still plague us, science stands on the verge of solving them, with an explosion of knowledge and technology so vast it will make our progress to date seem like a firecracker in the shadow of Nagasaki. Since the first of the year we've finished decoding the human genome—an achievement, more than any other, that should serve to demarcate the new epoch.

And so it is toward science and technology that Berry directs this splendid denunciation—in particular towards E.O. Wilson and his bestselling book, *Consilience*. It seems an odd choice of targets, for there are few titans of science who at first glance resemble Berry more than the great Harvard biologist. They are both courtly Southerners, passionate about the natural world (Wilson's greatest interest is ants), and devoted conservationists. Wilson is among the relatively small group of academic biologists who have not spent the last two decades turning their labs into start-up companies, choosing instead to work for biodiversity protection, and to promote the notion of "biophilia," that humans have evolved "to draw deep satisfaction" from the creatures and places around them. He is, in short, deservedly regarded as an environmental champion. Still, the sweep of *Consilience* invites a spirited response, for Wilson offered

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nothing less than a perfect distillation of the scientific faith: the idea that before too long our understanding of chemistry and biology—and ultimately physics—will have grown so complete that it will take under its wing the arts, religion, human nature, indeed everything. In such a worldview, the existence of God becomes "a problem in astrophysics," and "people, after all, are just extremely complicated machines." In a recent and revealing interview in *Salon*, he explained his position as a secular humanist, and his hope that all religions would evolve into some sort of humanist creed.

LIFE IS A MIRACLE:
An Essay Against Modern Superstition
by Wendell Berry
Counterpoint, $24.00

Berry offers a rich variety of responses, never intimidated by the scientific prowess of his rival. He makes hash of Wilson's claims about the humanities and faith, arguing that an inescapable and magnificent cloud of mystery surrounds our lives. You can learn all you want about genes, and the mind, will remain a combination of "brain and body and world and local dwelling place and community in history." (And history, he continues, in turn is "the whole heritage of culture, language, memory, tools, and skills.") Each will judge the issue for himself, but to my mind Berry more than delivers on his subtitle: He has routed the "modern superstition" of reductionism.

At some earlier moment in time, that might have been the end of it—an intellectual or aesthetic debate. But now, of course, it is a question with the highest practical stakes. Even if we can't ultimately reduce the world to a series of scientific principles, proceeding as if we could, may yield "progress" but it also may get us in deep, perhaps ultimate, trouble. To understand its urgency, Berry's book needs to be read in conjunction with a shorter essay, Bill Joy's "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us," which was published in the April issue of *Wired* magazine and can still be read on the *Wired* web site.

Joy resembles Berry in none of the superficial ways that Wilson does. A child of the suburbs, he grew up interested in science fiction, math, and computers. He has spent his career designing software for Sun Microsystems, where he is chief scientist, one of the wealthy kings of abstraction. And yet he has somehow preserved the moral sense necessary to ask important questions about what he and other technologists are busy doing. About whether the future they are building is a future we want.

In particular, Joy offers a stomach-turning warning about the rise of genetic engineering, closely followed by robotics, and by nanotechnology (the manipulation of matter at the atomic level to build molecule-sized "assemblers" that could cure cancer or clean up the environment.) What scares Joy, and should scare all of us, is that these technologies do not require exotic materials—they are "knowledge based"—and that they are self-replicating. That is, once you have set them off, robots are capable of producing new, more sophisticated robots; genetically manipulated plants can cross DNA with wild species; and nanotechnology could produce, say, "tough, omnivorous bacteria that could spread like blowing pollen, replicate swiftly, and reduce the biosphere to dust in a matter of days." (This is apparently known among nanotechnology aficionados as the 'gray goo' problem, since that is what the world might be reduced to.) In short, Joy kicks off a new wave of environmentalism, though he does not use the word.

Nanotechnologists and genetic engineers offer the two lines of defense that always mark these debates: We have safeguards in place, and it's inevitable anyway.

History should have taught us enough by now about the first assurance. Genes are already crossing in the field, despite Monsanto's pledge that they would not. Joy quotes supporters of these new technologies as estimating that they present perhaps a 50 percent chance of our species' extinction. As he writes (with a humility that will appeal to anyone who has had to deal with the buggy software his ilk produce), "my personal experience suggests we tend to overestimate our design abilities." Or, as Berry puts it, in the process that carries

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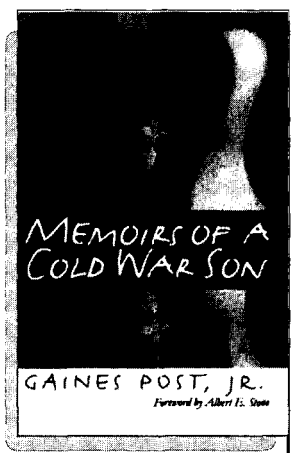
—David McCullough



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knowledge from the lab to the market, "there is not enough fear."

The second question, inevitability, may well turn out to be the crux of the practical argument. It's not that most people demand robotics or nanotechnology—most people don't want genetically engineered corn chips. As Berry writes, it might well have been sound policy to 'stay out of the nuclei' as we contemplated the future of biology. Certainly a good many people would have chosen thus, "but that was a choice they did not have. When a few scientists decided to go in, they decided for everybody ... Adam was the first, but not the last, to choose for the whole human race."

Is it possible to imagine some scheme that could restrain science? Joy, to his immense credit, tries. "The only realistic alternative I see is relinquishment," he writes. "To limit development of the technologies that are too dangerous, by limiting our pursuit of certain kinds of knowledge." He offers the example of our ability to back down from the nuclear cliff as a hopeful precedent, and indeed it is—though as Joy points out it will be endlessly harder to verify controls on what is essentially commercial technology. This work must be at the forefront of any activist agenda in the next few years.

But if we are ever even to attempt such a relinquishment, we need to heed the deeper message that Berry provides—the idea that we are not machines but people, and that that carries profound meaning. Joy quotes a friend of his, the avant-garde computer scientist Danny Hillis, who explains why the new technologies don't scare him: "I'm as fond of my body as anyone, but if I can be 200 with a body of silicon, I'll take it." Berry's book, indeed his life's work, attempts to show why such a dream, which clearly underlies our willingness to pursue dangerous paths, is pathetic folly:

"No individual life is an end in itself," he writes. "One can live fully only by participating fully in the succession of the generations, in death as well as in life. ... We can live fully only by making ourselves as answerable to the claims of eternity as to those of time."

That idea, once aesthetic and "spiritual," is now the most practical question we face, and it is the reason why *Life is a Miracle* is an indispensable handbook for the new age into which we now stumble.

BILL MCKIBBEN's *new book*, Long Distance: Notes on a Year of Living Strenuously, *will be published this fall.*

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Fast Faith

By Walter Shapiro

COMPASSIONATE CONSERVATISM: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Save America
by Marvin Olasky
Free Press, $24.00

YOU ARE MARVIN OLASKY. YOU are the youthful-Marxist-turned-middle-aged-evangelical-Christian right-wing social thinker who in 1993 introduced George W. Bush to what blossomed into "compassionate conservatism." From your perch at the University of Texas journalism school, you bask in your new-found public attention, even when the Christian newsweekly you nominally edit, *World*, runs a cover story by Bob Jones IV bitterly excoriating John McCain right before the South Carolina primary. Then there was the quote that *The Washington Post* took out of context about the unfitness of women for the presidency.

Okay, so you're getting a little nervous. You ask yourself: Am I too controversial for Dubya? Why have the media started giving Myron Magnet of *City Journal* equal credit for inspiring the Bush social gospel? You remember David Osborne, the author of *Laboratories of Democracy*, who at this point in the 1992 political season was hailed as Bill Clinton's guru. You also realize that it's been years since anyone mentioned Osborne's name. In short, even though you remain confident that Dubya continues to treasure your advice and insights, you're also adult enough to know that a presidential nominee, let alone the occupant of the Oval Office, can be fickle in his affections.

So what is to be done? How about a book called *Compassionate Conservatism* that will forever brand you as the avatar of the movement? A hard cover that will put you on TV explaining the philosophy right before the Republican Convention. Maybe even a book with a forward from Dubya that says, "Marvin is compassionate conservatism's leading thinker." (Oh, the negotiations with Karen Hughes that it took to get that sentence just right.)

Now for the hard part: What to put between two covers? A collection won't get you the attention you crave. But a real book, written in your take-no-prisoners-the-infidels-are-at-the-gate prose style, might finally scare off Dubya for good. Anyway, you need to soften your image a bit, sort of like John Steinbeck wandering America with his dog in *Travels with Charley*. Bingo! Why not go on the road for two months with your 14-year-old son, Daniel, and describe your visits to faith-based anti-poverty programs? You were scheduled to visit them anyway to do the real-people-telling-real-stories background research for Dubya's mid-1999 speech in Indianapolis defining, yes, "compassionate conservatism." In the corporate world, they would call this synergy.

So what's this obviously thin book like? Well, there are the requisite passages of shameless Dubya flattery: "Bush was clearly in charge, pouncing on generalities and pushing for specifics, as he always does." There are the irrelevant asides that suggest padding to hit a minimum page count: "We went to a ball game at Busch Stadium and saw Mark McGwire hit a home run." And, yes, there are inspiring, if repetitious, stories of moral uplift: "Bitter and unable to perform much manual labor, he sold

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drugs and saw no meaning to life until God grabbed him twelve years ago." Not to mention the saved and brave souls battling against poverty and anti-poverty governmental bureaucracies: "Payne was wearing a red tie with drawings of happy children on it, but most of the children he is responsible for are not smiling."

How does this mélange connect with compassionate conservatism? Well, the Big Idea is that if you gave lots of government anti-poverty money to religiously motivated community organizations and allowed them to continue to push salvation, you would theoretically begin to win the war on poverty. This approach should be contrasted with Al Gore's watered-down, have-it-both-ways notion of giving funds to faith-based institutions, but simultaneously making sure they don't proselytize.

As any admirer of the Salvation Army knows, there is a germ of truth to this notion that, while religion may be the opiate of the masses, faith works wonders in individual cases. It is a provocative issue—especially for liberals sensitive about the religious issues involved, but who should be impressed that there are some conservatives who genuinely care about eradicating poverty and are hard-headed about only funding programs that work.

Too bad, then, that *Compassionate Conservatism* is such a slapdash book. But then, come to think of it, Dubya is a pretty slapdash messenger

WALTER SHAPIRO, *a contributing editor for* The Washington Monthly, *is a political columnist for* USA Today.

WAY OUT THERE IN THE BLUE:
Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War
by Frances FitzGerald
Simon & Schuster, $30.00

Missile Millionaires

By Andrew Cockburn

"HE'S GOING TO DO IT," said the navy captain, clutching his companion excitedly. "He's going to do it!" It was the evening of March 23, 1983. In the officers' club at Fort Myer, just across Key Bridge from the District of Columbia, the usual motley assortment of active and retired military and attendant defense contractors and lobbyists were watching President Reagan deliver an address to the nation. His initial remarks in support of his 1984 defense budge request had provoked a scattering of derisive cat-calls from around the room. But now he was moving on to the theme that would make this speech famous: a proposal to develop a missile defense system in space.

Finally, the old actor on the TV screen called "on the scientific community of this country, who gave us nuclear weapons ... to give us the means of rendering these weapons impotent and obsolete." Ronald Reagan had just fired the official starting gun for that amalgam of fraud and inanity known to history as Star Wars.

"He's done it. He's done it. I'm rich, I'm rich, I'm rich," bellowed the captain in a state of near hysterical exultation, running from the bar in search of a phone.

I have never been able to think about Star Wars without recalling this scene at the launch of the great boondoggle. I don't know what happened to the navy captain, but a lot of people made a lot of money out of the enterprise, and in fact are still doing so. Sixty billion dollars didn't get spent just on *New York Times* op-ed articles and snappy one-liners from John Pike. It is a pity therefore that Frances FitzGerald eschews the question of money, who wanted it and who got it, in her weighty history of missile defense.

Instead, we get a mixture of Reagan psycho-history, familiar to readers of Garry Wills' brilliant *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home*, as well as some useful history, subsumed in many pages on Star Wars as it affected arms control policy in the Reagan years. Her account relies heavily on the memoirs of major office-holders at the Reagan court, which may explain why we learn a lot about policy and very little about pork, a subject that statesmen and liberal intellectuals tend to find too undignified for serious discussion. The Lockheed Corporation

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gets a paltry two mentions in the index, while TRW, briefly described as a company "with a substantial financial stake in space-based lasers," gets just one. Boeing, Raytheon, and other attendees at the trough pass without notice. It is not considered polite to mention the "military industrial complex" these days, however loudly it advertises its presence and influence.

Ironically, FitzGerald herself supplies crucial evidence that confirms the decisive role of the uniformed branch of the complex in bringing us Star Wars. Many people have been cited as the midwives of Reagan's vision—the physicists Edward Teller and Lowell Wood; the rascally former defense intelligence agency chief Danny Graham; but FitzGerald convincingly suggests that the idea came from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, particularly Admiral David Watkins, chief of naval operations. The Chiefs no more believed in an umbrella of lasers in outer space zapping Red nukes as they came over the North Pole than any other rational person, but they knew a threat to the defense budget when they saw one.

Ever since the later years of Jimmy Carter's presidency, the military and their industrial partners had been enjoying an unparalleled era of prosperity by promoting the specter of Soviet military and especially nuclear superiority. Among other surrenders, Carter had cravenly accepted the proposition that U.S. land-based missiles were under threat from an enemy first strike, agreeing to concrete over half of Nevada so that the MX missile could have a mobile home. But this had not been enough to buy the allegiance of the military, who had correctly foreseen that Reagan promised still richer rewards.

By the spring of 1983, however, the public was beginning to get the idea that all this talk from their masters about nuclear war might be serious. The nuclear freeze movement had spread like wildfire across the country. Half a million people marched through New York in protest. The Mormon Church and the Nevada Cattlemen's Association had emphatically vetoed the mobile MX. The Chiefs were worried by the freeze movement, and, more specifically, having sold the mobile MX as vital to our nation's survival, they needed a way to explain that maybe the MX could be stationary and still keep the republic secure. A defensive system to protect U.S. missile fields was advertised as a way to render nuclear weapons "obsolete" and thus lull the citizenry back to sleep.

Later on, when it appeared that Defense Secretary Weinberger and the functionaries actually running the Strategic Defense Initiative program might be getting ideas above their station and grabbing too large a chunk of the budget they were sharply reined in by the military high command. The program had served its purpose and could be relegated to a position of lower priority in the chow-line for tax dollars.

In the meantime of course the arms controllers and defense intellectuals had a wonderful time debating the issue, and FitzGerald dutifully takes us through the arcane battles over START and INF that so preoccupied people in those days. The Russians naturally played their part in the game. For years, Gorbachev dutifully echoed the line of his own military lobby by treating SDI seriously. By the time he woke up and told Reagan to go ahead and waste his money if he felt like it, it didn't matter; the Soviet leader was well on the way to reforming the Soviet Union out of existence, and the Cold War was practically over.

If proof was needed that missile defense had more-deep-rooted foundations than simply the addled imagination of Ronald Reagan or the technical fantasies of Edward Teller, current newspaper headlines supply it. Ronald Reagan is long gone, but the SDI lobby lives on, potent enough to extract a possible further $60 billion from our pockets on the grounds that we might some day be menaced by (starving) North Koreans, or (starving) Iraqis, or Iranians, or anyone. It doesn't really matter. Someone will get rich.

ANDREW COCKBURN's *most recent book is* Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein.

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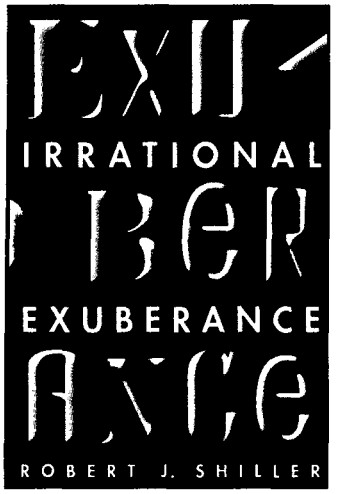

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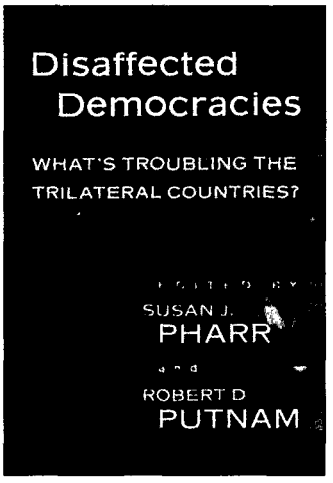

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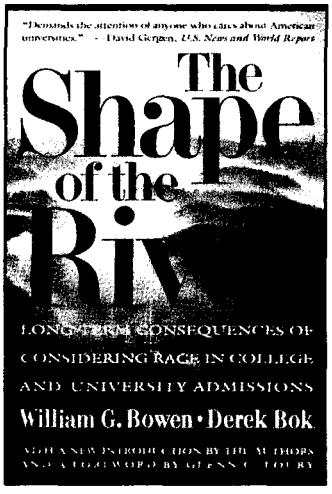

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